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ABSTRACT

RESTORING TRUST IN GOD:
AN OBSERVATION OF THE PROCESS

by
Carol Blanken Saenger

Professing Christians were interviewed who had a trust relationship with God, who experienced a significant trauma that caused their trust in God to be broken, and who subsequently have been restored to trusting God. Perceptions regarding theodicy and case histories of this particular aspect of their faith journeys were analyzed to determine if process similarities existed. A study model was developed and applied to all of the interview data, and a sequence was observed. The model may serve as a mapping instrument for those in ministry to those suffering distrust in God.

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AN OBSERVATION OF THE PROCESS

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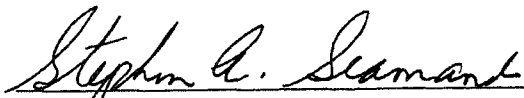
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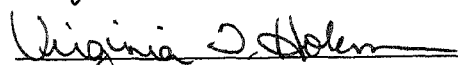
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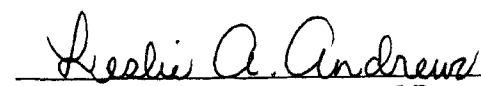
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RESTORING TRUST IN GOD:
AN OBSERVATION OF THE PROCESS

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Carol Blanken Saenger

May 2004

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many names appear on this page in my heart for I am deeply grateful for all who have supported me with their participation, thought, expertise, encouragement, and prayers.

You and I know who you are, and more importantly, God knows who you are, for He sent you to me in my time of need. Share the joy of knowing that without you this project would never have been completed. Let us praise God together. *"Come, everyone, and clap your hands for joy! Shout to God with joyful praise! For the Lord Most High is awesome. He is the great King of all the earth.... Sing praise to God, sing praises; sing praise to our King, sing praises!" Psalm 47 (NIV).*

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

*I am the one who has seen the afflictions that come from the rod of the Lord's anger.
He has brought me into deep darkness, shutting out all light.
He has turned against me. Lam. 3:1 (NLT)*

This besieged lament is indicative of the problem this study researched by observing Christians who had experienced loss of trust in God. This loss often occurs when the Christian who has put his or her trust in a good and loving God experiences a significant trauma, a life event that has caused physical, emotional, mental, and/or spiritual pain and suffering. As the person tries to make meaning out of the circumstance that is causing such suffering, the struggle ensues. The age-old question arises: "It is the eternal 'Why?'" (Rodd 95). The afflicted one asks, "How can the loving God I trusted allow such a terrible thing to happen?" Trust in a just, good, and all-powerful God becomes distrust. Often, the besieged Christian then struggles with the question, "Why is God mad at me?" The God who had seemed manageable in a distorted image of deity now appears to be a capricious God, intent on inflicting suffering. The questions proceed in what seems a logical, if not faithful, progression: "Why has God abandoned me?" "Who is God, anyway?" and "Does he even exist?"

Personal Context

This research topic arose out of my own personal needs as I struggled with trusting God after both a significant trauma (divorce after almost forty years of marriage) and a lesser one (feeling abandoned and, therefore, disillusioned by the church that had once supported my counseling ministry). The topic also was relevant to me as a Christian

professional counselor because I treat people who have been or are presently lost in doubt and despair caused by circumstances in their lives that have left them unable to trust and, therefore, to hope. My own struggle only reflected a tiny fraction of the problem of broken trust within the Christian community and the world of humanity. I was not alone.

My life had been turned upside down but I had to go on living, working, and wondering where God was in all of this personal chaos. Walter Wangerin, Jr. so perfectly describes me in that time period of my life in Orphean Passages, his book on the passages of faith:

She cannot at this pass perform her labors with the purpose of seeking Jesus, as she did in the third passage. He will not now be found this way. But that does not release her from work. Rather, there is no way that she can find Jesus since any way is a looking round and a demeaning of faith. No, she is bound to work, and why? Because even so does she herself participate willfully and completely in the absurdity which faithing presently is. Now this is the task of faithing: to continue preaching the dear Lord Jesus; to image him mightily before others in her own being, yet taking nothing of the image nor the solace for herself; to be the visible Jesus before others, calling them, in his name, to peace and to security, even while she herself languishes in darkness and the silences, shut up from him. It is the perfect paradox. (174)

That time frame represented the most devastating struggle with which I had ever had to contend. My whole identity had been shaken to the core. Where once I was a respected and loved Christian, wife, mother, daughter, grandmother, counselor, friend, godparent, church worker, now I was in a new state of being. I was literally in a new state—Kentucky instead of Alabama—divorced instead of married, and beginning again as a counselor but as a Methodist rather than a Lutheran.

Out of this struggle emerged some hope for the future, a resurrection. I began to learn to trust again. Hope, which is a by-product of trust, began to spring up, and I heard

myself once again saying, “God is good!” Wangerin again expresses what had happened to me in this experience:

He named you. He raised you, that you might announce his resurrection to the world. It is all one. In his rising was yours; in your rising is his made known. And so you *more* [original emphasis] than came to be when he named you, precisely because *he* [original emphasis] named you (this is what creating has been from the beginning and what language in the mouth of God has done): you came to be related unto him, which is love. And more than a merely static relationship, a fixed identity for you, it became an active relationship because he who made you also gave you something to do. Behold this woman: a being with a reason to be. And if she has a reason, then she also has a future toward which she moves with purpose and in hope. She has a ministry again, serving him, the source of her life, by crying his life, his title, and his love unto the world. (289)

As I found myself emerging from my position of distrust in God and once again entering into a trust relationship with him, I was intrigued with the transitional process. My mind queried, “How had such a process worked? How had I moved from one stage to another in regaining trust in God? Was there a defined sequence? What were the significant elements that God used to bring me back to trusting him again? Is this the way that God restores others to trust in him?”

Being familiar with various psychological models and theories that proposed stages in development, I began to think of my experience in terms of a model. I wondered if such a model for the restoration of trust existed. Had a theory of the stages I had experienced already been developed? If so, were the elements within the stages similar to mine? These thoughts motivated me to ask more questions and to begin searching the theological and psychological literature. I found Carolyn Gratton’s book Trusting: Theory and Practice to be helpful as I looked for resources. It was the beginning step of my study of the process and of the work on this dissertation project.

My purpose in choosing this dissertation project was to help fulfill a deep longing

inside: to understand what happened to me and, by doing so, to help others find the way out of their darkness so that they, too, will again come to believe this promise of God:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile. (Jer. 29:11-14, NIV)

Process Information

Christians, whose trust has been broken, are in the "groan zone" (Seamands, "Theology"). Suspended over a chasm of spiritual, emotional, or psychological uncertainty, the rickety foot bridge traveled through life has now come apart, and they are left dangling over a deep pit, hanging from a thin rope. The security once known is now gone, and the rope is hanging by a thread. Something must be done. Thinking that they surely will die if that rope is released, they desperately look for an escape. Mercifully, as in the movies, another rope suddenly appears, and like Tarzan, they grab onto it with whatever amount of trust is available. Swinging out into midair, they hope that rope will hold, and a place of safety and security will be found. Amazingly, once again they find firm footing. While not understanding how they got there, they breathe a sigh of relief. Wondering what will happen next, they realize the journey of life is constant change.

Theories of Change

The first step of this dissertation project was to examine what was known about processes in general. *Chaos theory* is the terminology used by some scientists and psychologists to explain the cycle of moving from a continuous to a noncontinuous system or vice versa (McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington 90). Developmental

psychologists Piaget, Kohlberg, Kegan, and others have labeled these periods *equilibration* (Kegan 43). Lewinian field theory, consistent with basic principles from engineering and physics, also supports the perspective that the current status of any dynamic phenomenon is not a body at rest but rather a body in *quasi-stationary equilibrium* (Lewin 204). Equilibrium, as distinct from rest, is the combined result of those forces pressuring to increase the current level of the phenomenon and those forces pressuring to decrease the current level of the phenomenon. According to the valence, either positive or negative, the pressures can move the equilibrium in a positive or negative direction. Building on this coexistence of positive and negative links, Roy J. Lewicki and Daniel J. McAllister argue that balance is dependent upon and transformed by new information:

Although parties may pursue consistency and the resolution of inconsistent views, the more common state is not one of balance but, rather, of imbalance, inconsistency, and uncertainty. Balance is the transitional state we pass through as we process information; the continually arriving wealth of new information, the salience and prominence of that information, and the multiple perspectives we have of this information continually push us toward inconsistency and incongruence. Balance and consistency depictions may be more accurately represented as single-frame snapshots of a dynamic time-series process, as relationships are transformed through new information that becomes available and is processed and interpreted. (446)

Whatever the name, systemic imbalance is an inevitable fact of life. Transitions from stability in one stage to a period of instability repeatedly occur. Having reached that new stage, stability once more is perceived, only to have the cycle repeat itself over and over again throughout life. One finds that the cycle of life, with all its vicissitudes, is a growth process and often a hair-raising adventure that requires risk taking in order to grow. That development only continues as the risks life offers are taken.

Taking risks relies on the basic need to trust. Brennan Manning writes, in Ruthless Trust, “To live without risk is to risk not living.... The way of trust is risky business.... All these challenges require a willingness to risk a journey into the unknown and a readiness to trust God even in the darkness” (21).

For those whose lives have been committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, this process can be bewildering as the discovery is made that, as Stephen Seamands says, “the Holy Spirit seems to be at enmity with the status quo in my life” (“Theology”). The imbalance often produces fear, doubt, and distrust in self and in God, but it also produces the motivation to move on. If one does not heed that drive to continue to grow and develop, life, in all its forms, is over.

The Human Context

Doubt and distrust plague human beings. Lack of faith and lack of trust, inextricably linked, are part of existence, part of human nature. “Faith [and trust], like human nature, suffers changes in its nature, just as our human worlds change” (Gillespie 75). The need for more information is evident about the basic trust/faith developmental process and what causes the loss of trust. The need to know what can be done to protect trust and restore it is vital to better understanding the suffering caused by brokenness in trusting.

Understanding what happened facilitates healing. As this understanding often occurs in the therapeutic arena where pain is divulged and is met with sympathetic and empathetic understanding of the problem, healing occurs. Gillespie conducted counseling research on the effectiveness of various therapies as to their success in the healing process, finding the greatest percentage of people who got better were those who

felt understood by the counseling agent. A direct correlation existed between the degree to which they felt understood and the degree to which the healing took place. V. Bailey Gillespie notes the importance of that correlation:

Knowing what people need, when they should have it, and when it makes sense are all considerations for methods in religious instruction, counseling, and pastoral ministry. If there are moments when the presence of God is more likely to touch reality, the minister should be aware of these moments. (235)

Those moments present themselves in ministry. Everyone wants to have answers. People come to the church with their questions about God. Although counselors, pastors, and teachers may not know all the answers, they must be prepared to offer a theology of suffering and a knowledge of God's goodness. The theodicy proclaimed must be correct.

God's majesty, power, presence, love, and faithfulness have to be shared in the arena of hurting lives. Imperfect and as seemingly arrogant as he was, Elihu, the last of Job's counselors, pointed to those attributes of God to help reframe Job's suffering and move him to a place where he could then listen to God (Job 36:1-37:24). Counselors, pastors, and teachers must help reframe faulty perceptions of God for those who come for help.

Elihu is not the perfect model of pastoral counseling in his confrontation of Job. He, too, succumbed to the temptation to judge Job: "Job, you are wrong. God can't be wrong. Humans can't be pure and innocent. God is greater than man" (Simundson 127). While counselors will not do everything correctly, either, a humble attitude and prayer will allow the Holy Spirit's power to flow and to heal. They become channels of God's character.

God's power is revealed in Christ Jesus as his Spirit enables the counselor to

enter into a relationship with one who is suffering. Tenderly listening and loving that hurting one earns the right of the counselor to share the truth that God, incarnate in Christ, also suffered an unimaginable anguish and that Jesus knows the sufferer's circumstances and feels the pain. God's presence is made manifest to the sufferer when he or she identifies with Jesus, God in the flesh. That identification may begin to allow a discernment of God's presence and God's will. Healing for the brokenness of distrust will begin, but all the questions that arise from suffering will not be answered.

Caregivers must be willing to admit their human inadequacy to have all the answers. They must be willing to answer the question, "How could a good God permit such suffering?" with a non-answer: "I have no idea, except that he stood where the suffering are, and suffered with them" (Garvey 9). When someone is told that he or she has to be willing to know nothing and trust anyway, resistance from the sinful self of the sufferer will arise because distrust is already the issue. An awareness is necessary that the spirit of despair and distrust gripping the sufferer will not let go without some kind of prayer of deliverance (Linn and Linn, Deliverance Prayer 1). Prayer then is essential to the process. Whether the counselor is praying quietly or with the sufferer, these points of resistance can be overcome only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

For those who counsel and do not have all the answers, the message must be conveyed to the sufferer, "I am in this with you." Counselors are in a "come alongside" ministry. This need for caregivers to come alongside when others suffer and this charge from God to be their brothers' and sisters' keepers also compelled this dissertation project.

As human beings in this world and as ministers in God's kingdom, counselors are

called to enter into a deeper understanding of how God heals and restores broken trust. They must be willing to stay engaged with the person struggling with trust issues and unanswered or unanswerable questions, embracing the pain with them. They must stay engaged even when the situation is uncomfortable. They must recognize the internal process for the struggler who has to come to his or her own resolution. They have to be willing to believe in the process. Christians can believe in the process because of the promise: “that he [God] who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Phil. 1:6, NIV).

The Problem: Part One

When Christian believers experience suffering, their trust in God is tested. This testing may produce doubt, despair, and feelings of abandonment by God. Depending on the significance of the trauma causing the suffering, a person’s trust level may be broken or severely damaged. Theodicy becomes the issue. How does one “speak about God (*theos*) with justice (*dike*) precisely at those points at which the divine purpose seems most implausible and questionable, namely, amid suffering?” (Oden, Pastoral Theology 223).

Theodicy and Distrust

If God’s goodness, justice, or even existence are questioned, then doubted, one’s trust in him is dealt a devastating blow. The struggle to make sense of the suffering threatens the security in God once held. The struggle can damage trust in self and in others, as well.

Humanity, recognizing the feelings of inadequacy of living in the face of adversity and its sense of limited power and control, tries to find meaning. In the striving

that ensues, it begins to realize that it is essentially flawed. The sinful human condition entails the self-serving entronement of the big “I,” the self, the ego, and the need to be God, especially when God is not being the God one knew and trusted.

Bewildered Christians reason that God has not allowed his people lordship in their own lives. He has not performed according to the prescribed plan or kept his end of the bargain that was one-sidedly struck with him. He has allowed this present distress to happen without authorization. They think they have every right to be angry because their expectations have been rent asunder.

Faulty theology is an underlying cause for false assumptions about suffering. Often, religious people act superstitiously, something akin to carrying a lucky rabbit’s foot or knocking on wood. Their actions involve something simple, like hanging a religious symbol on car mirrors to keep accidents from happening or performing a ritualistic behavior so that no ill may come near their houses. Job’s sacrificing a burnt offering every morning for each of his children may serve as an example for this kind of behavior. He worried that his children had sinned and cursed God. He was going to do what he knew to do to manipulate God and protect his children (Job 1:5).

This superstitious behavior is more pervasive in churches than Christians like to acknowledge. More often than not, a Christian who is in some personal crisis will ask, “How could this happen to me? I have always gone to church, tried to live a Christian life” as if he or she should be rewarded for such things. Believing that if a good life was lived, God would bless, the believer finds out that living what was thought to be a good life before God does not prevent suffering. This fact of life confounds faith, rattles trust, and confronts existential presuppositions. Such Christians ignorantly think, “Life may be

an automatic death sentence, but some of us apparently are supposed to get time off for good behavior” (Garvey 8).

On the other hand, there are times when Christians know that they have not lived good lives before God. Suffering is then attributed to punishment by God. Leslie Weatherhead writes in opposition to that retributive thinking, saying that while God does not will suffering, he uses suffering in believers’ lives. Weatherhead sees an essential difference between believing that God inflicts punishment through sending specific diseases or calamities and believing God has allowed his people to be in a universe where dangerous factors operate, which, through ignorance, folly, or sin, may bring suffering (111).

The thinking that reduces God to some sort of a formula needs to be acknowledged and resisted. It needs to be reeducated. Elisabeth Elliot, in A Path through Suffering compiles Scriptures to form a picture of why Christians suffer. She says that God has reasons for suffering that can be summarized into four categories: suffering for one’s own sake, suffering for the sake of God’s people, suffering for the world’s sake, and suffering for Christ’s sake.

First, Christians *suffer for their own sake spiritually* that they may learn who God is (Ps. 46:1,10; Dan. 4:24-37; Job), and that they may learn to trust and obey (2 Cor. 1:8-9, Ps. 119:67,71). They suffer that they may be shaped into the image of Christ who suffered for them (Rom. 8:29), and their faith may be strengthened (Jas. 1:3,12; Thes. 1:4-5; Acts 14:22). They suffer that they may reach spiritual maturity (Jas. 1:4) experiencing power in their adversities (2 Cor. 12:9); and, that they may be people of character, hope, and joy in the midst of pain (Rom. 5:3-4). Second, Christians *suffer for*

the sake of God's people so that they may be saved (2 Tim. 2:10). They suffer so God's people may be encouraged (Phil. 1:14), so they may have more grace extended to them (2 Cor. 4:15), and so that they may be blessed by the generosity of other Christians (2 Cor. 8:2). Third, Christians *suffer for the world's sake*, so that the world may be shown what love and obedience mean (Job; John 14:31; 1 Thess. 1:6; 3:4). Suffering may enable the life of Jesus to be made visible in ordinary human flesh (2 Cor. 4:10). Fourth, Christians *suffer for Christ's sake* so that they may be identified with him and share in his crucifixion (Gal. 2:20). They suffer that they might glorify God and share in the glory of Jesus Christ eternally (Rom. 8:17-18; Heb. 2:9-10; 2 Cor. 4:17) (197).

Regardless of how the Christian rationalizes suffering, human nature abhors it. Suffering is hard to explain, and simple or cliché-type answers are difficult to accept. Unbelievers have an easier time explaining suffering than do Christians who must attempt to relate God to the dimension of human suffering. David L. McKenna writes about the difficulty present in such an effort:

Human attempts to explain suffering and still believe in God always fall into the same trap. If a person denies the existence of God, suffering is no problem because it can be explained as the "luck of the draw" in a universe of random chances. (Whisper 92)

David Atkinson adds that the effort is most difficult for those who believe in a good God.

Suffering, in fact, is only a problem to the person with faith in a good God. The atheist, of course, has to come to terms with suffering, but for him it is merely a fact, part of the absurdity, perhaps, of the world. But the fact that many people perceive suffering to be a problem is itself a witness to the fact that there exists a good God, in whose light the existence of suffering poses us questions. (26)

If God were manageable and life were predictable, there would be no need to trust in anything. Such is not the case, and trusting God seems to be at the core of all

things Christian. It may very well be at the core of all things human. Trust is a universal need for human personality development and for faith development. It is the foundational basis for human relationships, and trust is central to a relationship with God.

Trust in God's salvation and plan is key to the Christian life. That trust in God is threatened when suffering is encountered, and without trust, the Christian soul is at the mercy of the enemy of the belief that God is a good God. C. S. Lewis, in A Grief Observed, writes of his personal experience with this phenomenon:

Not that I am (I think) in danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not "So there's no God after all," but "So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer." (9-10)

From any vantage point in the vast array of ways to approach living, when looking at the core of whatever philosophy, discipline, or strategy that may be chosen as the paradigm for life, one comes face to face with the issue of trust. Because trust is universally foundational for life, distrust (resulting from broken trust) is more than a problem. It is life-threatening. Sociologically, psychologically, economically, and politically, distrust is a malignancy. Spiritually, it can be devastating.

Spirituality and Distrust

Traditionally, psychologists have made a careful distinction between spirituality and issues of a religious nature. The Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms defines religiosity as being associated with religious organizations and religious personnel (208); whereas, spirituality refers to the degree of involvement or state of awareness or devotion to a higher being or life philosophy. A person's conflicts over beliefs, practices, rituals, and experiences related to a religious institution is thus fitted under religion; however, some forms of spirituality presume no external divine or transcendent forces (e.g.,

humanistic-phenomenological spirituality), and some spiritual problems involve distress associated with a person's relationships to a higher power or transcendent force that is not related to a religious organization (Lukoff, Lu, and Turner 21).

The secular world of psychiatry and psychology, however, recognizes that spirituality is an integral and essential part of individual personality development. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) has defined a clinical condition associated with spiritual or religious problems as "distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith" (685). The addition of this diagnostic code comes as a result of the number of persons seeking therapy for spiritual problems. A survey of American Psychological Association members found that 60 percent of their clientele often expressed their personal experiences in religious language and that at least one in six of their patients presented issues directly involving religion or spirituality (Lukoff, Lu, and Turner 22). This new clinical condition was proposed to facilitate understanding this present phenomena and also to reverse the general tendency of some helping professionals to disregard and even pathologize spiritual issues brought into therapy (Stanard, Sandhu, and Painter 205).

Just as some mental health professionals disregard spiritual issues, much of the Christian world tends to deny distrust, faltering faith, and anger at God. To be honest about such feelings is to threaten the removal of the mask that is worn by people in general and by Christians in particular who feel that they would be castigated if others knew the truth about their spiritual condition.

In general, Americans have become more interested in spirituality (Collins 10), as evidenced by the media's attention to the spirit. This fact leads to a logical conclusion: If

the secular world is getting serious about spiritual and religious matters, then the leaders in Christianity, the keepers of the faith and the caregivers (i.e., pastors, counselors, and religious educators) must get honest about discussing trust and faith issues. In their efforts to be faithful or inspirational, many are quick to point to the positive effects of faith, making victorious living and prosperity theology sound like the norm of Christian living. Inspiring and offering hope are important messages, but a balance is needed. The dark side of life also needs to be addressed so that Christians can see that when they struggle with circumstances that cause them to doubt God and lose their trust in him, they are not alone. This is a human condition, not only recognized within Scripture but also recognized within secular psychology's manual, the DSM-IV, and a heightened sensitivity must be shown for such strugglers, especially when they feel God has abandoned them.

The Christian community must respond to this spiritual need so that hurting, distrustful people are not lost but helped, and the temptation must be resisted to answer those in distress in the ways that Job's well-meaning friends did. C. S. Rodd writes, "The failure of [Job's] friends is perhaps the most tragic feature of the whole book. They came with such good intentions. They shared his silent suffering. But when he uttered his curse and bitter lament their response only increased his anguish" (97).

Not wanting to increase the sufferers' distress, empathy is required because they are in real pain and are genuinely baffled. The God who had been reduced to someone they thought they could manipulate and who was supposed to make good things happen because they were good, deserving people appears to have failed them. Now their God is capricious and cannot be trusted. He is like the gods of the pagans that had to be placated

to prevent terrible things from happening. Their God of love has become the God to fear. The logical faith questions then become: How can anyone love someone they fear? How can anyone trust someone they fear?

The Image of God and Distrust

A person's image of God is a vital consideration and one that needs to be explored as counselors work with those who are experiencing loss of trust. The way in which God is viewed determines "who we will let God be for us and how much we can let God give to us" (Linn, Fabricant, and Linn 41).

Viewing God requires going to the Word and looking for a correct image of God in whom trust can be placed. That correct image of God presents itself in Jesus, who said of himself, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NIV). He used the image of a loving parent to convey God's love in terms to which humans could relate. In Mark 14:36, Jesus modeled trust in a loving father as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane using the familiar term, "Abba, Father," meaning "Daddy" or "Papa." These intimate terms were not meant to reveal God only as a male person as opposed to a female person; rather, Jesus wanted to reveal God as an "intimately parental person (as opposed to the distant, patriarchal God-image of his day)" (Linn, Fabricant, and Linn 45).

Jesus modeled trust, again, as dying on the cross, he submitted his spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46). On the cross, Jesus redefined suffering and pain. Now those who suffer and feel abandoned need to hear that they share in the abandonment that Jesus experienced in his ignoble death on the cross. Jesus is our model: he suffered much for our redemption (Propst 44). His "cross illumines our hurts. It sheds light on them. It gives us a different perspective from which to view them. Reframed with wood from Calvary's

cross, our painful memory pictures look different” (Seamands, Wounds 12). This different viewpoint allows an observation of the process of healing, and in that observation lies the sufferer’s hope for the possibility to feel once again rightly related to God, that God does not mean this present suffering for evil but for good, and that he is a good God.

By reframing the image of God, by extracting the wisdom of God from his Word, and by identifying with the incarnated Jesus Christ, suffering Christians are able to deal with all the manifestations of distrust—anger, doubt, despair, cynicism, bitterness, and rage—through the hope, comfort, understanding, and grace found in the Word. God has restructured how life is perceived with the discovery of the Crucified One (Propst 45).

Patricia Gibson Meyers writes about this transforming experience:

Suffering presents a whole new world, one where the believer is weak and God is the strength, where the believer relinquishes self glory for the far greater glory of God.... It clears space in the life of the believer for God to rule and reign from within by the revealing of false gods, idols, and inadequate means of strength and security. (112)

Caregivers offer this Crucified One to those in pain in an attitude of shared existence and knowing, coming into the helping situation as Elihu did when he first spoke to Job (Job 32:6). “Elihu implies that he does not know any more than Job, that they are in this mess together, that Job need not regard Elihu as an authority who is trying to impose his own rationalizations about suffering on him” (Simundson 126).

The Problem: Part Two

The process of moving from a damaged trust in God to a position of restoration of trust requires attention. The process of how God initiated, motivated, and empowered healing is not clearly defined, nor is the part played by the one suffering distrust. This

study addressed that need by observing Christians who have come through their own personal trauma and loss of trust to discover how they have reconnected. Personal stories were gathered and examined to determine if similarities or common themes were present in loss of trust in God and in the process of the restoration of trust.

In summary, this study sought to observe the Christian's process of moving from broken trust in God to a restored trust and to compare that process to the restored trust model that I developed based on my research and my own experience. Those observations helped gain more information about the process, and as a result, Christian caregivers will be more effective in serving those who are suffering as they identify in what stage the suffering one is and where they need to facilitate growth.

The Purpose Stated

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discern elements within the restoration of trust in God process and to observe whether or not progressive stages occurred. The study observed Christians who had experienced broken trust in God following a trauma and who had subsequently moved to trusting in God again. The research sought to discover similarities and differences in comparing the experiences of individuals to the trust restoration model developed so that some general inferences may be drawn as to what that progressive process may entail as people make meaning from the experiences involved.

The study was not an exhaustive one because individual differences in the complexity of humanity prohibit such an endeavor. The Holy Spirit of God also works independently and individually with believers. Human beings are unique creations, and unique solutions to problems must be applied; however, necessity of trust is universal.

Similarities were found among study participants, and, thus, generalities could be made for use within a wider scope of humanity.

Research Questions

Research questions formed the framework of the study. The following questions represent the structure around which the research interviews were formulated.

Research Question 1

What were the key elements and progressive stages in the process of moving from broken trust in God back to a restored trust?

Research Question 2

In what ways did the experiences of the participants correspond to the trust restoration model that was developed?

Research Question 3

Did a significant deepening of the level of trust in God occur in the process?

Definitions

Acknowledging that in the psychological literature other kinds of definitions for some of the following concepts and terms exist, to accomplish my purposes I have defined the principal terms in this study as follows.

Broken trust is a feeling of being abandoned by God. Characterized by pervasive feelings of disillusionment and disappointment in the God in whom the Christian once trusted, broken trust represents the doubt and despair a person feels when his or her expectations of God have not been met.

Restored trust is a feeling of once again being able to trust in God, rely on him, have faith in his providence, and believe in his goodness. Restoration is experienced

when the person has transitioned to a restored position of trust. This restoration is evidenced by an increased trust in God manifested in the living of one's daily life, accompanied by a sense of increased spiritual well-being.

Trauma is a wound to a person's life. The wound may have been caused by an extrinsic agent (a physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual distressing life event) that produces a disordered psychic, spiritual, or behavioral state resulting from mental, spiritual, or emotional stress. Trauma is an agent, force, or mechanism causing such significant distress in the believer that it results in distrust in God and/or loss or questioning of faith.

Suffering results in the feelings of pain and distress incurred as a result of an affliction of physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual circumstances. Suffering is being forced to endure the unavoidable distress and anguish of mind, body, and spirit that a person feels when an unexpected, threatening, life circumstance or event occurs in his or her life.

Theodicy is the attempt to view the justice of God through the lenses of human suffering. Life's harsh enigmas render belief in a benevolent deity difficult. Theodicy is the attempt to defend divine justice in the face of aberrant phenomena and the continuing existence of evil that appear to indicate the deity's indifference or hostility toward virtuous people.

Meaning making refers to the efforts humans exert to make sense out of what is happening to them. Because humans come equipped with the need for rationality, meaning making involves mentally grappling with their perceptions of their circumstances. When meaning or significance of the circumstance can be identified,

people can find some comfort and more easily accept what is happening to them.

Caregiver, faith keeper, Creator-connector, and trust-bridge are synonymous terms for those Christians who are used by God to come alongside the sufferer and who provided a connection to God to those who felt abandoned and, therefore, disconnected from God. In many instances, the terms represent a progression of duties performed in the process, i.e., caregiving and faith keeping were usually required before connections with God could be reestablished and trust could be bridged.

Methodology

This study used the qualitative research method of the phenomenological in-depth interview. Two separate interviews were conducted with each participant. The sixty-minute, tape-recorded interviews were scheduled (not more than two weeks apart to not less than two days apart) to accommodate continuity and to allow the participants to have some reflection time between sessions. Dolbeare and Schuman designed the interview model that was used, allowing the interviewer and the participant to “plumb the experience and to place it in context” (Seidman11). The first interview established the context of the participants’ experiences. A focused life history on the topic of trust in God was taken. The participants reconstructed the details of their experience within the context in which it occurred as it focused on the traumatic life event that caused distrust in God to develop. The second interview encouraged the participants to reflect on the meaning their experiences held for them and to share the process of their restoration (11-12).

The interview protocol was composed to elicit responses that target commonalities and differences in the process through which people go as they move

from distrust in God to restored trust. The interviews generally followed the structured interview questions so that every participant had the opportunity to answer the same questions in the same order. Some participants were so involved in the telling their stories that sticking to the script of the interview protocol was difficult; however, every effort was made to make sure that the research questions were asked and answered so that the research done would qualify as a comparative study and reliable inferences could be drawn from the results.

Semi-structured interviews using a prescribed set of questions to which each participant responded were used (see Appendixes D and E). Because of the nature of qualitative research, the interviews began with specific research questions. I was aware that adjustments may be required over time in an “attempt to cover all cases of the phenomenon under study to arrive at a comprehensive, descriptive model” (Wiersma 209); however, I did not need to make any adjustments in the interview protocol.

In most qualitative research findings, the reader connects with the phenomena cited, adding to his or her knowledge of the subject. In this study, I sought to have readers not only connect with the stories but to explore the possibility of generalities of the experience under study.

Population and Subjects

The population sample was composed primarily of seminary students at Asbury Theological Seminary but also included believers from a local church. Twelve Christian men and women who were at least 22 years old were targeted for participation.

Sampling

After obtaining the support of J. D. Walt, the Vice President for Community Life

of Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS), to present and promote the study within the Asbury community, I contacted Anthony Shelton, ATS Director of Student Life. Because his position is one of providing counseling assistance to students, Anthony knew of potential participants. Wanting to honor their confidentiality, he sent a letter that accompanied my solicitation letter (see Appendix A). He verified my student standing and assured those to whom he sent both letters that the research was being done under the authorization of the Student Life Department and the Doctor of Ministry program. The solicitation for participants included information about me and why this research project was being conducted. The study was described, defining criteria for participation, so that respondents were able to determine if they met the research criteria; that is, had they been through the process of moving from broken trust to a restoration of trust in God.

Participants were selected based on convenience sampling (availability) and snowball sampling (sampling participants who have been recommended by others who were familiar with the study). All participants who responded were quickly contacted by mail, telephone, or e-mail, according to their preference. The prospective participants were scheduled for an initial visit to allow for us to become acquainted before the actual interviews were conducted (see Appendix B). During that initial contact, we scheduled the interviews, reviewed the procedures of maintaining confidentiality, and discussed my expectations and theirs. Rapport was readily established, which made the actual interview process easier. Each participant signed the consent form with the information requested (see Appendix C).

Measures to insure confidentiality were discussed with all prospective participants, and confidentiality was maintained for each participant through the use of

pseudonyms in the written text and transcribed material from the taped interviews.

Instrumentation

Tape recordings were used to gather data. All tape recordings made during the interviewing process were given to participants who wanted them or destroyed. Tapes were transcribed so that a sorting technique for determining existing patterns could be used effectively.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each pattern or theme in the data was assigned a different color. For example, the theme of “Image of God” was given the color orange, and the theme of “People Who Helped” was purple. After going through the 223 pages of transcribed material and selecting interview quotes that fit into research categories depicting elements within the process of restoration, the color-coded quotes were consolidated so that I had all of the thematic (i.e., “Image of God,” etc.) information in one place. This process of categorizing, sorting, and searching data facilitated my qualitative research. It honed my observational skills and interpretation in making an accurate analysis of the data as I read and reread several times the complete interview of each participant.

Field Testing

The solicitation letter, informed consent form, and all interview protocols were field tested on three people, at random, who did not have previous knowledge of this study (see Appendixes A, B, C, D, and E). The respondents were asked to critique these instruments for clarity. I incorporated their feedback into the above forms.

Further feedback was solicited following the pilot field test when the complete research methodology (with the exception of interview protocol for the second session,

interview 2) was used with a single participant. Interview protocol for session 1 was conducted. The feedback resulted in further refining of the methodology for another field test with the same participant during the second interview using interview protocol for session 2. Feedback from field testing was incorporated into the final research protocol.

Delimitations and Generalizability

The study is limited in that I did not address potential research topics as to whether differences exist in participants, such as gender, age ranges, maturity of Christian faith, and severity of trauma. Denominational affiliation also was not addressed. Time, money, energy, and other constraints further limited the study since the number of participants had to be restricted.

Some schools of thought may consider the study to be limited in that it makes use of a researcher as part of the instrumentation since the interview was an interactive process; however, researcher bias was taken into account. I kept a journal to prompt an awareness of potential biases as the research was conducted. I used the qualitative research validity measure of triangulation to make a comparison of the participants' interviews, the theological underpinnings, and the psychological foundations for the research.

While this study did not provide all the answers to the questions of suffering and theodicy or to the process of the restoration of broken trust in God, it provided a significant contribution to the art of ministry as people shared their stories and connections were made that link spirituality and humanity. Robert Schuller preaches, "We are not human beings on a spiritual journey; we are spiritual beings on a human journey."

This study detected patterns for the restoration of trust in God that may be generalizable to a wider population because the whole Christian community is subject to this phenomenon. Counselors and pastors may be aided in their work with people who are struggling with faith/trust issues. Identifiable reference points will serve as a foundational structure for effective counsel. Chapter 3 presents a more in-depth presentation of methodology.

Theological Foundation for the Study

Patterns of human trust and distrust regarding God are found throughout Scripture. Examples of trusting obedience as opposed to the distrustful exercise of self-will are readily found. The human temptation to trust in self rather than in God began literally at the beginning in Genesis. Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent to doubt and distrust God: "He [the serpent] said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"'" (Gen. 3:1, NIV). That question and the response made by Adam and Eve changed the course of human history. That crafty query caused the woman to wonder about what God had said. Eve heard the words of God. She knew exactly what God had commanded (she even repeated God's command to the serpent), but she entertained the idea that God may not have used good judgment in making such a decree. Maybe he really did not mean what he said. The great deceiver then refuted what God had said. "'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Gen. 3:4-5, NIV).

As Satan accused God of having unworthy motives, Eve began to doubt not only God's judgment but his integrity in his command to them. She rationalized that eating the

apple made sense because it looked like good food, and, according to Satan, it would make them wise. The idea appealed to the human need to be in control. Adam and Eve believed that in eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would be morally independent of God. They would be judges of what is evil and good, a prerogative God reserved for himself alone.

The serpent was correct about their eyes being opened. They realized that they were naked, and they were ashamed. They no longer had the innocence of children; they had a new awareness of themselves and of each other. Distrusting God resulted in their disastrous dismissal from the Garden of Eden.

In contrast, Noah trusted God and was obedient in following orders to build an ark. "Noah did everything just as God commanded him" (Gen. 6:22, NIV) and was blessed by God who established a covenant with him (Gen. 9:8-17). The covenant was an unconditional divine promise never to destroy all earthly life with a natural catastrophe, and the covenant sign was the rainbow in the storm cloud.

Abraham, cited in Hebrews 11 for his faith, illustrates the ways that humans vacillate between trusting and distrusting God. The Lord had told Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his father's house and to go to the land that he would show Abraham. God made a promise to make of Abraham a great nation, make his name great, and make him such a blessing that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3, NIV).

Two covenants were made with Abraham, whose belief and trust in God was "credited to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6, NIV). The first covenant was an unconditional promise to fulfill the grant of the land. The second was a pledge to be

Abraham's God and the God of his descendants. This second covenant came with a condition: total consecration to the Lord as symbolized by circumcision.

Still, Abraham had his moments of doubt, disbelief, and distrust. He coerced his beautiful wife, Sarah, to lie and say that she was his sister to keep him from being killed by the Egyptian Pharaoh, who had taken her into his palace and treated Abraham well because of her (Gen. 12:10-20). God saved them, but Abraham pulled this distrustful trick again to save his own neck (Gen. 20:2-17).

Another point of distrust occurred at the announcement that Sarah would conceive at the age of ninety. "Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?'" (Gen. 17:17, NIV). The child, Isaac, was born and was used by God to test Abraham. His trust in God was pushed to extreme limits when God told him to take Isaac and sacrifice him (Gen. 22:1-19). God spared Isaac's life, and through his lineage, Jacob was born. From Jacob, the nation of Israel emerged as God renamed Jacob Israel (Gen. 35:10) and faithfully passed on the covenants he had made with Abraham and Isaac.

In the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God was developing trust and faith again. He reestablished trust by keeping his promises. God the Father, Creator, Provider, Sustainer, and Nurturer continued to be faithful even when the nation of Israel did not. Throughout the Old Testament, God's faithfulness is assumed and humankind's suspicious, distrustful nature is displayed. Israel's unfaithfulness is a true picture of the human condition.

As the Great King over all the earth, the Lord had chosen Israel to be his servant people. He delivered them by mighty acts out of the hands of the world powers, gave

them a land of their own, and united them with himself in a covenant of his redeemed kingdom. Their destiny and his honor came to be bound up in this trust relationship. Israel was to live among the nations, loyal only to the Lord God. “She was to trust solely in his protection, hope in his promises, live in accordance with his will, and worship him exclusively” (Hoerber 785).

The covenant God made with Israel was one of consistent, holy love out of which Israel could grow and prosper as the children of God, trusting him for everything. He gave them vision, values, purpose, and power in an unrelenting display of faithful love. The Israelite nation, however, “believed not God nor trusted in his help” (Ps. 78:22, NIV). Isaiah warned them about the futility of putting their trust in anything other than Yahweh:

Woe to the obstinate children, declares the Lord, to those who carry out plans that are not mine,... Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression and depended on deceit, this sin will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant. It will break in pieces like pottery, shattered so mercilessly that among its pieces not a fragment will be found.... In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, “We will ride off on swift horses”.... Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion.... How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you.... Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely upon horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord. (Isa. 30:1, 12-14, 15-16, 18, 19; 31:1, NIV)

Israel’s history is full of attempts at self-sufficiency only to have God remind them time after time, “Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods” (Ps. 40:4, NIV). The temptation to trust in self rather than in God seems to dominate the Old Testament. It continues to plague God’s people. Gratton explains why humans have difficulty trusting God:

Not only is the experience of human trusting permeated with ambiguity; the experience of the Divine is also, for “no one has ever seen God” (1 Jn 4:12), and our knowing is always permeated with non-knowing, our faith with doubt, our seeing with blindness. What holds us back from trusting God is that we cannot even imagine the heart of Christianity, the utterly gratuitous love of God that comes to us in Christ. We tend, instead, to settle into the mediocrity of doxic confidence in our familiar narrow ways of self-sufficiency and ignorance. Busily making ourselves safe in his eyes, we hide like Pharisees behind human prudence and observance of the law, instead of selling all we have and making Christ our security. (211)

In the New Testament, Paul’s thinking about trust and distrust are evident in Romans 9 as he uses the word *faith* (in Greek, *pistis*) and its opposite, literally *unfaith* (*apistia*), which translate *trust* and *distrust*. Paul laments Israel’s tragic failure to hear and trust what God has spoken. Israel’s distrust caused the Jewish people to be unfaithful, just like the Gentiles. Nonetheless, their unfaithfulness could not negate the faithfulness of the God who had embraced them through the covenant promise spoken to them. Paul, applying what Richard B. Hays calls “the hermeneutic of trust,” trusted that God had not abandoned Israel as he wrestled with Scripture and found his way to a powerful new reading of God’s promises:

In Paul’s fresh reading of scripture, the whole mysterious drama of God’s election of Israel—Israel’s hardening, the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God, and Israel’s ultimate restoration—is displayed as foretold in scripture itself. This foretelling can only be recognized when scripture is read through the “hermeneutic of trust.” (222)

This hermeneutic of trust requires the Holy Spirit to work in our minds and hearts because, even at a basic level, that supernatural work is always God’s initiative, motivating the willingness to listen to the Word of God and apply it. Hays’ description of *election*, *hardening*, and *restoration* seems to correspond with the process under study: trusting God, distrusting God following a trauma, and restoration of trust. In the first

stage of the process, trusting God is like *election*, which Hays describes as having a position in God. Distrust following a trauma corresponds with a *hardening* of the self against God, and the restoration of trust is comparable to Hays' term of restoration (222).

The hermeneutic of trust not only applies to the use of the Word, it also applies to those who are called to be faith keepers, those who hold the hearts of the hurting, offering their own faith and trust in God to stand in the gap for those whose faith and trust is shaken or broken. The hermeneutic of trust becomes the context for restored trust. It becomes the redemptive nature of the relationships between the faith keepers and those who are suffering. Through the caring intervention of faith keepers, who give love, a basic trust can be reestablished. As enough love is received to establish basic trust, "we are likely to be able to trust God and also have a foundation for the virtue of hope" (Linn, Fabricant, and Linn 43).

Employing the hermeneutic of trust, the book of Job is examined in Chapter 2 for the theological implications of this study. The witness of the goodness of God's character, his willingness to listen to doubts in times of trouble, and his faithfulness to make himself known will be illustrated.

Overview of Study

Chapter 2 presents selected literature pertinent to the theological and psychological aspects of trust. The theological foundations of trust in God were studied by examining the life of Job and his dilemma. The relationship between trust and faith was explored. The development of trust in a human prefaced the etiology of how trust is lost, and psychological research on the restoration of trust was examined. A scriptural model of the restoration of trust, which melds the psychological and the theological

elements into a cohesive form that may be used by Christians who work with restoration of trust issues, was developed and explored.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation regarding the design of the project, the research methods, and the methods of data analysis. Chapter 4 furnishes an analysis of the research findings, and Chapter 5 summarizes the research and makes practical applications that flow out of the research. It also offers suggestions for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENTS IN THE LITERATURE

A project on the restoration of trust requires an examination of both theological and psychological literature to review how trust is foundational to human development and spiritual formation. The combination of scriptural references, theological commentaries, and psychological research presents a more complete picture of what trust is, how it works in the life of human relationships, and what happens to trust in the presence of trauma.

Judith Herman describes how trauma invades one's sense of trusting:

Traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of the creation.... The sense of safety in the world, or basic trust.... forms the basis of all systems of relationship and faith. (51)

A traumatized person, who trusted in a good God until personal experience produced doubt about God's love, justice, mercy, and goodness, feels betrayed. The element of trauma moves this study into the larger issue of theodicy, the attempt to demonstrate the justice of God in the face of evil to reconcile the goodness of God with what appears to be unjust suffering.

For Christians, biblical insights provide an interpretive lens for understanding psychological research as it applies to trusting God; therefore, the spiritual underpinnings of this research are examined before the review of secular literature is undertaken. The scriptural and theological focus is on the book of Job, tracking Job as he moves through progressive stages toward the restoration of trust, which this study seeks to define. For purposes of delimitation, the book of Job and associated commentaries are the major sources consulted even though other examples of trust and distrust in Scripture could have been used (i.e., the story of Joseph). The book of Job, however, seems to illustrate the progression more effectively.

Collateral material regarding how faith and trust interrelate and how trust is formed, lost, and regained informed this study. The psychological review focuses on developmental theories and current research in the field of the restoration of trust. Finally, a model is presented that synthesizes the theological and psychological perspectives. This model was used as this study's hypothesis and compared to research participants' stories as they were analyzed to establish generalities in the process of restoration of trust.

Theological Reflections

The book of Job graphically portrays human encounters with God in the midst of the pain that life so often inflicts. The mystery surrounding what appears to be innocent suffering is a big question for humankind. "How can the justice of an almighty God be defended in the face of evil, especially human suffering—and, even more particularly, the suffering of the innocent?" (Hoerber 731).

Theodicy is the issue. Defining the concept, Thomas Oden writes that "Theodicy means to speak justly of God amid the awesome fact of suffering. Its task is to vindicate the divine attributes, especially justice, mercy, and love, in relation to the continuing existence of evil" (*Pastoral Theology* 223).

The book of Job is a uniquely Israelite statement on addressing the subject of theodicy. Ancient Israelites held the indisputable view that God is almighty and perfectly just and that humanity is flawed. No human is wholly innocent in God's sight. This traditional orthodox view is manifested in the series of speeches made by the friends of Job. Theodicy, for them, was not a problem, because its solution was self-evident: humans were sinful and deserved what they got from God.

This view differs from Greek and later Western thought about God and suffering. When moderns grapple with the questions concerning seemingly innocent suffering, some assumptions are made that were not true for the ancient Israelites. According to Robert G. Hoerber, these assumptions concerning God in his mysterious dealings with

suffering humans lead one to believe that “(1) God is not almighty, (2) that God is not just (that there is a ‘demonic’ element in his being) and (3) that man may be innocent” (731).

Just as modern believers are perplexed trying to blend their beliefs that God is unsurpassably good and incomparably powerful with the reality that suffering and evil nonetheless exist, the ancients were also trying to mesh their traditionally held views about God with their actual experience. Their orthodox theodicy brought no comfort or guidance. “The God to whom the sufferer was accustomed to turn in moments of need and distress became himself the overwhelming enigma” (Hoerber 731).

Modern believers faced with this dilemma may try to hold onto God’s goodness but question the limits of his power. The presuppositions (ideas of who God is based only on what humans want him to be) made about God and the responsibility he carries of being a good and all-powerful God only serve to add to the confusion. The book of Job is a highly relevant discussion of the modern plight amidst what is considered undeserved pain. McKenna writes, “With all Christians who suffer, Job finds himself suspended in the paradox of a loving God who permits suffering among the innocent and the righteous as well as among the wicked” (*Communicator’s Commentary* 92).

Theodicy plays a huge role at the foundational roots of this research on restoring trust in God, following a significant trauma in the life of a believer. Atkinson writes regarding Job’s existential dilemma:

The book of Job does not answer the questions of theodicy: it does not tell us how to justify God’s ways in the face of suffering. Job’s problem is not so much a question of understanding on an intellectual plane, as an existential crisis in his living relationship with the living God. (99)

The existential crisis that existed for Job was that his trust had been broken in the God he had thought of as the benevolent dictator, the one who ruled over everything. In the first two chapters of the book that bears his name, Job was extolled by God as an exemplar of faith and trust in the Almighty. As the story progresses and Job was afflicted,

doubts about God's justice and goodness appear to intrude on his thoughts. He felt as though he were in the hands of arbitrary power, suffering for what he had not done. When the sufferings were physical, Job was calm and silent, but when doubts of God's goodness were entertained, he collapsed (Ridout 35).

In examining the book of Job for the theological foundation of the proposed research, observation of Job's process of brokenness and restoration revealed some generalizable aspects for today's suffering believer. It does not answer all of the questions that the sufferer may have, but it offers a model for trusting and it offers some hope for one's own existential crises.

The Process of Job's Restoration of Trust in God

While some may argue that Job's trust in God remained consistent as evidenced by his words, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15, KJV), distinct observable stages appear in the process of Job's loss of trust and the way he deals with the grief he suffers at feeling abandoned by God. In some ways, Job's process reflects Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of grief or Lewis B. Smede's stages of forgiving. Kubler-Ross's five stages of the grief process are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (38-137). Smede postulates four stages in the process of forgiving where a trauma has caused grief: acknowledging the hurt, expressing the hate, experiencing the healing, and coming together to resolve the breach in the relationship (2). Atkinson follows Job through seven phases of the process of restoration. With the trauma came numbing shock and silence. Lament and questioning, anger against God, despair in the face of God's almightiness, and terror and anxiety at feeling abandoned by God followed. Throughout the process progressively growing glimmers of hope emerged, and, finally, restoration occurred (105).

Stages of Recovery

For the purposes of this research, Atkinson's model was followed as observations were made as to how Job's trust in God was broken and of the process involved in the

restoration of his trust. The stages allowed for more specific observations to be made and categorized accordingly.

Trauma. In the book of Job, the Israelite theodicy of God's relationship with Job involved a third party, the great enemy, who was bent on frustrating God's creation. The adversary sought to drive a wedge between the two and effect an alienation that could not be reconciled. The adversary, Satan the accuser, attempted to attack God's beloved Job and to show God as a fool (Hoerber 731).

Satan accused Job of being godly only to be self-serving, charging his integrity as being insincere. Ironically, Satan knew nothing of integrity, "nothing about the intrinsic value of righteousness that springs from a good heart or genuine love.... To him, every act could be explained by a selfish motive" (McKenna, Communicator's Commentary 38). If the righteous man in whom God delighted could be shown to be the worst of all sinners, to be without integrity, and to be self-serving, then God and Job would be alienated and redemption would be impossible:

Then even redemption was unthinkable, for the godliest of men would be shown to be the most ungodly. God's whole enterprise in creation and redemption would be shown to be radically flawed, and God could only sweep it all away in awful judgment. (Hoerber 731)

God allowed Satan do as he pleased with Job, but he specified a limit: Job, himself, was not to be touched. God wanted to vindicate himself and Job before Satan. He wanted to silence Satan. The anguish of Job began: his herds were stolen or killed by lightning, his servants were killed, and his children died in a terrible wind storm. Job grieved the loss, but his trust in the Lord remained intact. That trust was reflected in his words and in his worship: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (1:21, NIV).

Satan came again and taunted God implying he had only scratched the surface of

Job's vulnerability. He said to God, "He [Job] blesses you only because you bless him. A man will give up everything he has to save his life. But take away his health, and he will surely curse you to your face!" (2:5, NLT). God allowed Satan to test Job further, again limiting Satan: Job was not to be killed. In addition to all the grief Job had to bear, now incredible sores afflicted him from his head to his toes (2:7). Job took himself outside the city to the garbage dump where lepers were confined and sat on the ash heap.

Traumatized, he sat there as just another piece of trash, yet he did not curse God.

God's trust in Job had been vindicated. Job retained his faith and integrity before God, but Job's level of trust had suffered a devastating blow. Faith is a supernatural gift given by God, and while it can be shaken, a God-given spark remains that can be rekindled. Trust, however, involves the will. Oden states that trust is based on the human experience of observing faithfulness and making a personal choice:

To trust a person is a more decisive, risk-laden act than to trust empirical evidence. We say that one believes in a fact when one is assured of its truth, but one believes in another person only when one is sufficiently assured of that person's trustworthiness.... Faith relies on the trustworthiness of God. (Life in the Spirit 130-31)

The person of God was now in question for Job. God's faithfulness, trustworthiness, and goodness were in doubt. As the ancient Near Eastern culture influenced his views of God, Job may have entertained thoughts about the possibility of God's wrath before his affliction, as evidenced by his making sacrifices every morning for his children in case they would have incurred God's wrath by cursing him. Now the wrath of God appeared all too real. Job could not understand why God would turn on him.

Frank Lake writes that Job's affliction did not begin with the cataclysmic destruction of his family and possessions. An incipient sense of mental pain had existed all his life. "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me.... I was not in safety, neither had I read, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came" (581-82; Job 3:25-26, NIV).

Trust was almost completely eclipsed as the dreadful doubts began to gnaw at

Job's heart with a pain beyond his bereavements and his sores (Ridout 57). His wife, perhaps in her own distress as she watched Job suffer, increased the temptation for him to distrust God and to lose all hope. She urged him to take the suicidal step that would most certainly end the misery, "Curse God, and die" (2:9 NIV). Job called her foolish and did not sin against God by cursing him. Inwardly, her words slammed against his trust in God and caused him to consider the value of dying and to wonder if she was correct in her observations. Outwardly, he said the godly thing: "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (2:10, NIV). One is left to wonder, however, how much of an inward battle he was fighting not to succumb to her plea.

Job had been the epitome of the believer who relied on the grace of God to prosper and bless the upright man or woman of God. Job based his faith and trust in God's goodness to him. That faith and trust did not know darkness until the bottom dropped out of his confident, predictable world, causing him to doubt the God he thought he knew.

Shock and silence. How long Job sat on the ash heap in silence is not told. The only sound may have been the scraping of his painful sores with a piece of broken pottery, which served as a symbol of his broken life. His bewildered contemplations surely must have covered the ground of shocked denial: "This is not happening to me!" His horrifying physical condition, however, would bring him back to reality. He must have thought over and over in his mind, "What have I done to deserve this?" Always he came back with the answer, "Nothing! I have done nothing to deserve this!" His self-contemplations, however, were powerless to alleviate the suffering of his soul.

His friends heard about Job's affliction. They came and did not even recognize him. "Can this wretched, loathsome object, covered with putrid sores, sitting in the midst of ashes, be their stately friend, the greatest man of the East? They burst into tears, rend their garments and sit down with him" (Ridout 32). Their presence as they sat with him in silence indicates how deeply moved they were. Their silent contemplations, after the

first shock of Job's condition was over, must have been to ask, "Why, God? Why has this evil come upon Job?" Their false conclusions came to rest on long-held, culturally influenced beliefs that God prospers the righteous but punishes the ungodly. Their logic pushed further, Job was being punished; therefore, Job must be ungodly. Their views were later presented to Job in a series of speeches in their efforts to move him to repentance for the sins that caused God to punish him.

Lament and questioning. At the end of seven days of silence as he tried to process the shock of his suffering, Job finally broke open. Like a wound that festered until the pressure was too great to be contained any longer, Job acknowledged his pain. He cursed the day he was born. In questions born out of the pain, he asked, "Why was I born?" "Why did I not die at birth?" "Why must I continue to live when I want to die?" "Why has God trapped me in this inescapable place?" His questions cried for an answer to the mystery and the misery, "Why, O Lord, why?"

"Why?" is the human question asked out of curiosity, doubt, and bewilderment. At times it is yelled out in despair. Job's agonized cries of "Why?" are a reminder of Jesus on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34, NIV) Standing on this side of Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection, believers now are enabled to identify the suffering "Why?" questions with his suffering. Job did not have that comfort. His existence, unsurprisingly, was one big question mark.

Anger at God. Job began to explain to his friends the magnitude of his pain. He shared the orthodox theology of his friends and believed that God was aiming his arrows of judgment at him, though he did not understand why. "God's terrors are marshaled against me" (6:4, NIV). He claimed the right to yell and used the example of animals who bray and bellow because they have not been cared for properly. He repeated his earlier pleas for death to release him. He was angry, full of bitterness against God. Job, who began his grieving in quiet, escalated to making charges about God and ended in a wail. Words fail to describe the misery of Job that led him to speak about God in this

way. The bodily suffering had not wrung these bitter cries from him. Job had lost, or was in danger of losing, trust in God's goodness.

Job's anger found its own arrows. Job's friends, in their efforts to defend God and accuse Job, were eventually met with bitter sarcasm from Job, who stated that a man should have the devotion of friends even if he forsakes the fear of the Almighty (6:14). Job complained to God in an honest expression of emotion. In angry self-pity he told God, "For soon I will lie down in the dust and die. When you look for me, I will be gone" (7:21, NLT). One can almost hear him screaming, "You'll be sorry, God, that you treated me this way!"

Job continued to voice his awful complaints against God in 9:16-20, 22-24, 29-35 and in 10:1-7 and 13-17. Job did not believe he was sinless, but he wished to have his day in court so that he could prove he was innocent of the kind of sin that deserved the suffering he was being made to endure.

Job did not abandon God or curse him, but he came very close. Job persevered with impatience. The "patience of Job" is a false picture of Job. He did not have patience; he just persevered. He kept on keeping on, but his trust was broken. In 10:1, Job again spoke out in the bitterness of his soul. He became increasingly vocal. He imagined that God was angry with him and that God took delight in the wicked (10:3). Job's bitterness came out of the disillusionment with God that he felt.

Job's friends also disappointed him as they tried to argue theology. He was unable to bear their accusations against him. Even if what they had said about God was correct, their timing was inappropriate. Job needed a response of love and understanding rather than a rational argument. When Job tired of trying to persuade his friends that even though he was a sinner, he did not deserve this kind of treatment from God, he stated that he wanted to argue his case to God (13:3). The friends kept pressing Job to repent of his sin, and he adamantly stood up for himself against their charges.

Despair at God's almightiness. Job despairingly recounted how mighty God was

in comparison with how wee he was. He reasoned with Bildad and with himself, “Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.... He moves mountains. ... and overturns them.... He shakes the earth” (9:3-6, NIV).

Job realized that he needed someone stronger than himself to deal with the mightiness of God. He needed a mediator, someone who would arbitrate between himself and God: “If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God’s rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more” (9:33-35, NIV). Job spoke for all of humanity when he uttered these prophetic words for all people need such a mediator: Jesus the Christ. Where believers now have the confidence that the holy throne of God may be accessed, Job suffered without such knowledge.

Job continued to question God. He again wished to die (10:18) and wondered why he was even born. He believed that he had the right to challenge what he perceived to be God’s unjust actions (11:3). Job was deep in despair, consumed by the unapproachable power of the Almighty. His friends accused him of mocking God, but Job spoke out of his despair:

If I hold my head high, you [God] stalk me like a lion and again display your awesome power against me. You bring new witnesses against me and increase your anger toward me; your forces come against me wave upon wave.... Turn away from me so I can have a moment’s joy. (10:16-17, 20, NIV).

Job pleaded with God. If only God would leave him alone, then he might know one moment free of the agony of feeling that God was angry with him.

Terror and anxiety of abandonment. Even while Job asked God to leave him alone (“Withdraw your hand from me and stop frightening me with your terrors” 13:21, NIV), he was terribly afraid that God had already abandoned him. He asked God, “How many wrongs and sins have I committed” (13:23, NIV) and, “Why do you hide your face

and consider me your enemy?” (13:24, NIV). The anxiety was producing a paranoia. Job felt harassed by a God who had taken him captive and was tormenting him. Crying out to God, he asked to be hidden in the grave until God’s anger had passed (14:13). He emphatically told God that he destroys hope (14:19). God only assailed him and tore him up in his anger. God had abandoned him and had turned him over to wicked men (16:11). Everything was going along so well, then God shattered him, “He seized me by the neck and crushed me” (16:12, NIV). Job, whose spirit was broken (17:1), continued to paint a graphic picture of a merciless God.

Struggling with the enigma of his suffering, Job could only conclude that God was his enemy. God had wronged him and shrouded his path in darkness (19:6). “He uproots my hope like a tree” (19:10, NIV), and “his anger burns against me” (19:11, NIV). “The hand of God has struck me” (19:21, NIV). The paranoia and terror grew.

Glimmers of hope. Because grief is always a process that fluctuates from one stage to another, not necessarily progressing in an ordered way, Job rode on his roller coaster of emotions moving from the stages of despair to lament to anger, back to lament, etc. Interspersed in these moments of defiance, a glimmer of that spark of faith, a glance of that trust and confidence in God, bursts forth.

In 14:12-17, Job experienced a moment of fleeting hope. Atkinson observes that Job “is hanging on until things change” (87):

If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me again.... I will wait for my renewal to come. You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made. (14:13-15, NIV)

In the midst of all his lamentations, Job uttered those magnificent words of faith, “I know that my Redeemer lives” (19:25, NIV). Job expressed faith that ultimately God

would vindicate his faithful servant. “He doubts God’s ways, accuses him, but is confident that if he could only see him all would be cleared” (Ridout 120). Job turned now in the midst of all his turmoil to the very one whom he was maligning, reflecting those thought processes of the bewildered believer that fluctuate between belief and unbelief (97). “Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24, KJV).

Restoration of trust. Job’s reply to the third speech of Bildad closes the direct controversy he was forced to have with his friends. The three were apparently silenced. Elihu came forward with a more empathetic approach:

His words place Job in a position to listen. Job’s silence may well be taken as a token of beginning conviction. Elihu causes Job to ponder: is he like God? Elihu closes with the basic tone of his theme—the absolute all-sufficiency of God and his abhorrence of the pride of man. (Ridout 211)

Elihu’s speech provided a transitional bridge from the friends and their accusations of Job’s sinfulness to God’s coming in answer to Job’s desperate pleas. Elihu extolled the majesty of God, his creative powers, his incomparable greatness. “Elihu brings us from theology to wisdom, from argument and despair to God himself” (Atkinson 136). He moved Job to a higher plane of thinking. Job was shifted from his defensive posture to a new understanding about himself and about God. An amazing change happened in Job. Elihu finished his speech, and Jehovah, out of the whirlwind, uttered his awful pronouncements and questioned Job.

Job, sitting in judgment of the Almighty, had accused God of evil. He had flooded the Lord with grievous lamentations, proud protestations, and audacious accusations. Much was true in Job’s words, but he was touting his own righteousness at the expense of God’s. He had desired that the Almighty would answer him. Now his wish was granted.

At the end of the book of Job, God silenced everyone, then spoke to Job. Job

realized that in his suffering he had not understood God's purpose and he had spoken out of ignorance. Job had been torn between what he knew of God and his goodness and what he did not know about God's purposes. Now, God's divine perspective was delivered to Job. He did not give either a legal or a logical answer to why Job had to suffer, yet Job somehow knew that his suffering had meaning and value to God (Hoerber 732).

God drew near and made his presence known through attention to his creation. Job had spoken many things about God in the past, but he had never known his actual presence. Having seen God and experienced him transformed Job. "When God is personally recognized as present, he is thus recognized in the entirety of his being. It is not merely his power that is seen, or his greatness or even his goodness, but *Himself* [original emphasis], the one in whose presence seraphim veil their faces as the cry 'Holy, Holy, Holy'" (Ridout 211).

Gone was the self-righteousness and pride. Job could only cry, "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth" (40:4, NIV). Job completely reversed all that he had spoken and surrendered.

God did not condemn Job for his rage, angry outbursts, and despairing remarks about God or himself. God recognized Job's honesty and valued it. Matthew and Dennis Linn write about the importance of honest communication:

I heard Job cursing the day God made him,... and I want to congratulate [him] for telling it like it was, for knowing how to pray. Modern psychology in a massive effort to release men from destructive, subconsciously repressed emotions is trying all sorts of therapeutic methods of sensitivity to put men in touch with their true feelings. The unwritten but practically certain promise is that, if one will learn to express his true feelings to others, he will in this communication deepen his relationships with others and through these deepened relationships find

mental and emotional health. This is equally true of prayer. If I mask myself before God, I will never really communicate with him, never really pray, never really get to know him or feel that he knows me. The relationship of faith will be superficial at best, filled up with pious clichés, religious fantasies and delusions. (Healing 82)

The gift of honest communication enables real relationship. Job does not hold back in expressing himself. He is engaging God with his questions and with his observations rather than shutting himself off from God. He discovers that, “We need not remain cut off from God when we are plunged into suffering.... We can speak to God as we are, not as other people think we ought to be” (Thompson 8)

Job was driven back to God in his suffering. He recognized that God had a divine perspective that he did not. God used suffering to make himself known (Atkinson 37), and God used suffering to redeem his people (Seamands, “Cross” 12). Joni Erickson Tada and Steven Estes describe how the cross of Christ makes clear this undeniable truth that binds together relationship and redemption:

By itself, suffering does no good. But when we see it as the thing *between* [original emphasis] God and us, it has meaning. Wedged in the crux—the cross—suffering becomes a transaction. The cross is the place of transaction.... It’s where *relationship* [original emphasis] is given birth and depth. The cross is the center of relationship with Jesus. (135)

How Trust Develops

Trust constitutes the very essence and existence of relationships. Humans experience trust, psychologically and relationally, long before they speak their first words. As the parent meets nearly all of the infant’s physical and psychological needs, the infant develops trust that the parent will respond to his or her cries for help. At the same time, a fundamental sense of confidence in the environment or trust in the world develops. A belief in “personal omnipotence” (that sense of having some control or

power to act on one's environment) emerges as these nurturing, cumulative experiences provide the existential and psychological background for the child's self-confidence and his or her confidence in others. This confidence supports the infant's movement toward trusting others and having confidence in organizing his or her experiences. Parents convey a sense of trustworthiness and reliability not so much by the quantity of food or demonstrations of love they provide but by the quality and consistency of their care. By the ways they hold and handle the child and by the guidance, permissions, and prohibitions they give, they convey to the child a deep, almost bodily conviction what they are doing has meaning. The child, feeling cherished and included in the parents' world, experiences an inner sense of trustworthiness and reliability that can balance the terrors of separation and abandonment (Fowler, Stages 55).

In such an environment, the infant experiences a sense of control over his or her bodily and psychological space. If a loss of this experience through deprivation occurs, self-disorganization is experienced. The belief that others will respond and are obliged to respond is linked to a sense of trust that "I am cared for" and "I am of value" and, correspondingly, a sense of confidence emerges that "my experiences relate to the way the world is" (LaMothe 1201). The loss in the belief that the caregiver is obliged to respond and respect the child leads to a fundamental loss of trust.

E. H. Erikson hypothesized eight sequential stages through which individuals move based on their psychosocial experiences, the first of these being *trust versus mistrust* (219). Trust typically develops from birth to eighteen months and is primarily contingent on the quality of the infant's relationship with the one obligated to care for it. Matthew Linn, Sheila Fabricant, and Dennis Linn reference Erickson, in Healing the

Eight Stages of Life, where they validate that a bond of trust is formed. This bonding happens primarily in the first stage of infancy, especially through the ways the infant is touched and held (27). They have observed that Erickson's own understanding of his eight stages is that they are not sharply defined, following each other in an ordered, one-at-a-time progression. Instead, they see that Erickson believed that throughout life, as humans experience love in all of the stages through which they have passed, a deepening of the first stage of basic trust continues:

We go through the stages in unique ways, partly because traumas or other events affect each person differently.... Growth comes not from getting through the stages on time or in order, but from receiving love at whatever stage we are in. If we let ourselves be loved wherever we are,... we will automatically grow. (17-19)

The resolution of the crisis of trust versus mistrust has profound ramifications for the later development of faith. Faith is directly related to the mother figure upon whom rests the responsibility for developing trust in infants (Erikson 221; Fowler, Stages 71). The mother figure, who may be male in gender, is vital to trust development. The Bible presents God in many images, including that of a comforting mother (Isa. 66:13). That nurturing capacity provides the environment for trust and faith to take hold.

Mistrust and withdrawal into self, perhaps from all relationships, may result if that basic trust has not been established. The child will distrust self and the world. If the child's needs are not met, the child thinks that his or her needs are bad, and the self is left feeling empty and not good. Because children blame themselves for everything, the child will blame him or herself for having had those "bad" needs. This blame then generalizes to being a "bad child":

If there is extreme deprivation of love or sudden abandonment, the child may go into a chronic state of mourning and perhaps be depressed for the

rest of its life unless healing comes later. Medical doctors now recognize the fatal consequences of severe deprivation of love to the extent that they've given this condition a name: "marasmus." (Linn, Fabricant, and Linn 37)

James W. Fowler, in building on the work of Erickson and other developmental psychologists for his model of the stages of faith, theorizes that trust and faith are formed in the earliest relationships of the infant with those who provide faithful care. Trust and faith become responses to an acknowledgment of fidelity. He observes that the capacity for faith to grow through experiencing trust and fidelity or diminish through mistrust and betrayal are part of humans' closest relationships. Faith is a way of seeing the shared visions and values that hold human groups together. It is the search for an overarching, integrating, and grounding trust in a center of value and power sufficiently worthy to give life unity and meaning, but it is not always religious in its content or context. Faith is the way of making sense of and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up life. Humans require meaning. People need purpose and priorities. There must be some grasp of the big picture (Stages 4).

Religious faith is life giving and life transforming. It gives a place to belong and a way to make meaning of life. Religious faith, born out of trust in the Transcendent Other, is a person's way of leaning into and making sense of life based on the belief that life has purpose simply because he or she has been created by a power greater than self.

Religious faith must acknowledge and deal with the deep, internal tendency to make the self into the god of the universe. From sin, self-absorption, and all the life structures that arise, religious faith must provide liberation and redemption through the faithfulness of the transcendent God.

Religious faith must enable people to face tragedy and their own mortality in the

devastating and bewildering forms in which they come without giving in to despair. Religious faith must be modeled and taught by the faithful witness of people whose lives have been transformed through the love and power of God. Faith comes by hearing and sharing in the stories of the faithful God and his love for unholy, faithless people who are changed into the likeness of Christ through his gift of grace and love.

How Trust and Faith Are Related

The early Christians demonstrated their understanding of this connection between faith and trust as they used the same Greek word, *pistue*, for “faith” in God and for “trust” in a parent. Scripturally, the terms for trust, faith, and belief are used interchangeably. Oden writes, “Faith as trust is implied even in the etymology of the Hebrew verb *aman* (to believe), to remain steadfast, to stay, to make the heart firm (Ps. 31:23, Neh. 7:2; Dan. 6:4)” (*Life* 130). He further quotes Luther who defines true faith as “that assured trust and firm assent of heart by which Christ is laid hold of” (141).

Faith, classically understood, is not a separate dimension of life, a compartmentalized speciality. It is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose to one’s hopes, strivings, thoughts, and actions. It is the dynamic system of images, values, and commitments that guides one’s life. Thus, faith is a universal quality of human living.

At the very core of faith must be a basic trust that allows the reaching out experientially beyond the self to hold on to the reality of what seems unreal and to believe and to act in ways that are consistent with ultimate concerns and understanding of the self. Faith, even though shored up and validated by evidence, is prior to knowledge and leads to belief (Gillespie 20). Everyone who chooses to go on living operates on

some basic faith by aligning his or her heart or will to a commitment of loyalty and trust in the transcendent about which concepts or propositions are fashioned (Fowler, Stages 11).

Trust and fidelity are central among the qualities that make and keep humans human. As creatures striving for understanding, meaning making (see Definitions) is intrinsically tied up with promises and fidelity. Accordingly, Fowler in his Stages of Faith tries to clarify a developmental perspective on the human enterprise of developing trust and fidelity and of imaging and relating to others and to the universe. Keeping his focus on human faith, Fowler avoids giving direct attention to normative perspectives on the being, character, or will of God. He hopes that both readers from a variety of religious traditions and readers who have no religious affiliation will find this way of looking at so fundamental a feature of human life to be fruitful and informing.

Like J. Piaget, who distinguishes four successive stages of moral development (26-27), Fowler identifies six stages of faith. The emergent strength of faith in the first stage is the fund of basic trust and the relational experience of mutuality with the caregivers providing love and care. The pre-stage begins with the seeds of trust, courage, hope, and love. These elements are fused in an undifferentiated way and contend with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies, and deprivations in an infant's environment (Stages 54).

Gillespie, seeking to improve on Fowler's work, develops seven situations in his models of faith, which are roughly correlated with the life cycle. Wanting to give those in ministry some viable and more useful information to minister to various Christian populations, he develops his model with a view toward nurturing the faith experience. He

makes the assessment in The Experience of Faith that “anyone reading Fowler’s faith stages is overwhelmed by his terminology in the categories of faith.... They are almost impossible for most church workers in application in the life of the church” (71).

Rather than attempting to incorporate all of the faith developmental stages set forth in the various models, the literature review of Fowler’s and Gillespie’s work focuses only on the first stages of faith defined by Fowler’s pre-stage of “Undifferentiated Faith” and Gillespie’s “Situation One–Borrowed Faith.” They inform this study on the basic element of trust in the formation of faith. Both theorists agree as an infant is consistently cared for basic trust is developed and faith grows from that basic fund of trust. Gillespie’s “Borrowed Faith” proposes that in early childhood God’s trustworthiness is modeled as parents provide basic trustworthiness in the home (54).

In Fowler’s “Undifferentiated Faith,” the quality of mutuality and the strength of trust, autonomy, hope, and courage (or their opposites) are developed. These qualities underlie (or threaten to undermine) all that comes later in faith development (Stages 121).

Fowler believes that faith results from a maturing of the faith response. While it is true that one does mature in faith, I would argue that at each age, whether mature or not, faith is genuine and real and, in some sense, has unique integrity. Fowler’s kind of thinking follows some developmental psychologists’ theory that each stage builds upon the next stage and must be mastered before such a transition can be made. I much prefer Wangerin’s concept of *faithing* defined as a flow, a flux:

To be in faith is ever to be moving through the passages of faith, and to be moved by them. It is a verb. Faithing is the constant losing of one’s balance, the constant falling forward (which is the risk required even for so common a locomotion as walking). It is the constant loss of stability,

the denying one's self and dying into God; into God Yahweh; into a Who and not a What; into a God who groans, grows angry, repents himself, returns, does battle, lifts his child on eagles' wings, teaches the child to walk, delights in promising and keeping promises, suffers the disregard of his delinquent child, yet cannot make that child as Admah nor set him as the Zeboiim; into a God who threatens general destruction of his people and then, instead, comes among the people himself as an infant prepared to be destroyed. (10)

Faith can never be spoken of as providing complete assurance and total acceptance or providing a complete knowledge of God's will. From the deep recesses of the heart and experience, Christians, however, may know that they are motivated by the Holy Spirit in accepting this mystery of faith. Karl Rahner calls this "movement toward God at work within him [the believer] 'grace,'" (15). Grace enables the Christian to let go of self and to enter that mystery:

A Christian cannot enter God as an obvious item in the balance sheet of life; he can only accept him as an incomprehensible mystery in silence and adoration, as the beginning and end of his hope and, therefore, as his unique ultimate and all-embracing salvation. (14)

The Holy Spirit confirms and validates the trust, belief, and hope in God that compose faith.

How Trust Is Lost

Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, in Shattered Assumptions, addresses how trauma affects psychological balance. She proposes that most people have three fundamental assumptions: "the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful, and the self is worthy" (6). These positive illusions enable trust and confidence. She writes, "Our core assumptions are positively biased over-generalizations. Although not always accurate, they provide us with means for trusting ourselves and our environment" (25). When something happens to any of those basic assumptions, feelings of security and safety are

threatened. "The world is suddenly a malevolent one.... because the world of people is seriously tainted. Trust in others is seriously disturbed" (78).

The etiology of loss of trust is varied. In Development or Restoration of Trust, Christina E. Mitchell lists some of the reasons how trust is lost: (1) The faulty, inadequate development of trust may be based on a single trauma or on long-term environmental conditions; (2) Emotionally distant, inconsistent, or abusive parenting contributes to mistrust; (3) Significant events having negative consequences, such as when a person is repeatedly disappointed by others who fail to behave in an anticipated positive manner, are another cause of mistrust; (4) Distrust may be modeled by parents and other significant persons who speak of the unreliability of others, causing their distrust to be learned and assimilated into the personality of the child; (5) Humiliation may cause mistrust when a person is let down and then ridiculed for being naive enough to trust others; (6) Under-confidence in one's own trustworthiness may be generalized to others; (7) Low self-concept and self-doubt about one's ability to survive disappointment militates against readiness or willingness to trust another; and, (8) Rigidity and the need for control, especially with the perception of a lack of control, also contribute to the problem (851).

Interpersonal trust is related to psychosocial competence. Without trust, People have low self-esteem and feel lonely, isolated, unloved, and betrayed. The feeling that others do not like or accept them produces a sense of rejection and isolation that causes dislike of self and mistrust of others, possibly becoming progressively worse and leading to paranoia. Failure to trust locks a relationship into the status quo or nudges it toward increased guardedness and lack of good will. Without trust, a relationship is kept at a

superficial level.

Several related losses contribute to a loss of trust, according to Ryan LaMothe in his article "The Absence of Cure." He differentiates between the psychological trauma that results from natural events (acts of God) and trauma that is caused at the hands of other human beings, which he labels "malignant trauma." Natural events such as tornadoes, floods, or threatening events that come from outside the social order are very different from those events which are of human design. LaMothe defines the following six characteristics of natural trauma: (1) shock, terror or panic, numbing and confusion, (2) a profound sense of powerlessness, (3) intense anxiety linked to death of family and friends, (4) an attempt to regain a sense of control, safety, security, (5) depression, anger, guilt, and hostility, and (6) a renewed sense of powerlessness associated with the loss of objects needed for self-organization (i.e., personal possessions). For those who have sufficient psychological capacities and social support, these experiences may be worked through as memories that were previously nonsymbolized. They become symbolized and, therefore, can be communicated to interested and empathic listeners (1196-99).

Malignant trauma, however, cannot be symbolized because the achievement of symbolization is contingent upon experiences with an obliged, trustworthy, and faithful other. Symbols can represent failures in obligation, trust, and fidelity because they are implicitly joined to experiences of trust and fidelity. Symbols cannot represent the very absence of obligation, trust, and fidelity manifested in malignant trauma. The absence of these experiences results in a construction of reality without symbolization, which results in psychological disorganization.

The five experiences of loss in malignant trauma are (1) shock associated with the

loss of the expectation of help, (2) loss of control over the integrity of one's body, (3) loss in the belief that the other is obliged to respond to a cry, (4) loss of trust associated with the experience of betrayal, and (5) loss of another's commitment to recognize, respect, and respond to one's desires and needs. LaMothe writes from the context of researching Holocaust victims and the psychological disorganization that resulted from the trauma inflicted, not as a result of natural trauma, but as a result of the brutality of German Nazis. He says that cure is not possible for those who are traumatized at the hands of other human beings because these losses represent "nearly absolute powerlessness and helplessness experienced at the hands of other human beings, which cannot be grasped, integrated, or mediated through the human capacity for symbolization" (1199).

Having traumatic experiences will not mean that previous and future experience or organizations of experience will be disorganized or fragmented. Nor does going through such trauma mean that the person cannot recover to live and function in productive, meaningful, and fruitful ways. Having no cure, malignant trauma, however, will always leave a victim feeling a stranger in the world because he or she has experienced not treason nor infidelity but the absence of fidelity and trust in human relations.

The book of Job is perhaps an answer to LaMothe's construction of the absence of cure. Job is restored or cured after experiencing both kinds of trauma defined by LaMothe: natural acts of God and malignant trauma at the hands of humans whom he thought were his friends. Job experienced such trauma because he had the expectation that his friends would support him. "The expectation of help is one of the fundamental

experiences of human beings and it is tied to other human beings.... The expectation of help is as much a constitutional psychic element as is the struggle for existence" (1200). Job assumed that his friends would help him when they came; instead, they drove him further to despair. The absence of help, the experience of being helpless, results in a person becoming isolated. Loss of control over the integrity of his own body inflicted further psychological and physical trauma.

These losses normally would contribute to a fundamental loss of trust in human beings. Job lost such trust in his friends, and though his trust in God's goodness was doubtful, a hope remained that God would vindicate him (Job 13:15). Human trust was broken, his trust in God was severely tested, yet he avows that he expects God to restore and cure him.

The Christian does not have to experience the hopelessness of an absence of cure. McKenna has written a compelling answer to the universal question about suffering and its cure. He shows how events that begin in catastrophe can end in celebration, seeing the promise of Jesus and the dimensions of grace in Job's story of suffering. Job was restored and cured. "The God of grace has made Job a man of grace. Instead of seeking revenge against his friends who betrayed him, he prays for their forgiveness and they are accepted by God" (Whispers 161).

How Trust Is Regained

Metaphorically speaking, Seamands says that humans' ability to trust is the result of having been hardwired with built-in trust receptors. When those trust receptors become wounded, reaching out to God painful. "Memories of past disappointments convince them [wounded persons] God will *always* [original emphasis] be indifferent.

They also stir up shame. Feeling that God has abandoned them confirms they are worthless” (Wounds 62).

Awareness of someone whose own trust receptors are not working, prompts the counselor to act as God’s tool and to offer to stand in that gap. The counselor becomes a surrogate trust receptor for the wounded until trust can be restored and the person may move on in life, having his or her own trust receptors open to receiving God’s goodness and living in trust and faith in him again.

Working with someone whose trust is broken requires patience, understanding, and confidence. It is a lengthy process. A plan of action for the restoration of trust is needed.

The Study Model for the Restoration of Trust

The following model was born out of personal experience. This study model resembles both the Atkinson and Mitchell models but adds a spiritual dimension to the mix because it reflects the way God dealt with me in the process of restoration. I was delightfully surprised when I discovered in the literature on trust that these models existed. I experienced an “Aha!” moment. Knowing how God had led me through a process of restoring trust in him and then finding information written in places other than in my own heart gave greater value to the process. In this case, my process became the source of my doctoral research. I wanted to see if other people went through similar elements and sequencing of the restoration of trust.

Atkinson’s Seven Phases

At this point, a quick review of Atkinson’s seven phases of Job’s restoration process is needed. The reader may identify the feelings that Job had and be able to relate

them to the study model. They are

1. shock and silence,
2. lament and questioning,
3. anger at God,
4. despair in the face of the almightiness of God,
5. terror and anxiety at feeling abandoned,
6. glimmers of hope, and
7. restoration of trust (105).

These phases were evidenced in the study as the participants acknowledged their trauma and expressed their feelings. Much of the information they shared focused on how angry they were at God. The venting of that anger in the safety of sympathetic and empathetic people was an important part of their healing. Job thought he had been provided some comfort when his friends came and sat in silence that first week of their time together. He felt safe to vent his feelings with them. By coming alongside they had won the right to enter his soul and to hear his lamentations. Nevertheless, when he really expressed how angry and disillusioned he was, the friends began to try and defend God. They argued with Job, and their intervention did not accomplish what they intended.

Counselors walk a fine line. To enter into someone's lament is a challenging ministry, and it requires of the listener an ability to trust in the Lord, to trust in the one who is suffering, and to trust in the ongoing process. Knowing these seven phases through which Job passed aids those in the counseling ministry for it serves as a map through some very serious territory. Counselors can watch for progress in the process as they listen with love and refrain from making assumptions or being too pushy.

Mitchell's Treatment Plan

Mitchell's research adheres to the following treatment plan in working with someone whose trust has been destroyed:

1. Provide some rationale for trusting again;
2. Readjust the thinking process;
3. Evaluate the safety (but discomfort) of distrust and compare it with the risk of trusting (possible comfort) again;
4. Allow freedom of choice in choosing whom to trust (preferably someone who has proven trustworthy in the past);
5. Arrange for opportunities for closer observation of this person and make gradual increases in interaction;
6. Start with a small issue that calls for a minimum of trust and intentionally choose to trust with that issue;
7. Make daily observations on how the experiment is progressing as the examples of trustworthiness are recorded and specific data is collected;
8. Increase significance of issues that the person is willing to entrust and intentionally choose to do so;
9. Remember past experiences where trust has been displayed;
10. Have goals and subgoals for trusting. Experiment and record the expectations, goals, and actual outcomes to give a sense of self-control and competence in managing each experiment in trusting; and,
11. Review specific, observable changes in trusting behavior since the beginning of the experiment. Make objective reports of increased incidence of related positive life

events (848).

A vital part of Mitchell's process was to assure the student that trust can be learned (850). The treatment plan Mitchell researched follows these psychological developmental and learning theories: learning is incremental, learning is through trial-and-error, and learning is through observation and experience. Relating her research to my biblical studies, I found that Scripture is full of learning theory, (e.g., "Taste and see the Lord is good" Ps. 34:8, NIV). Psalm 119 is replete with references to "Teach me your ways, O Lord" (NIV), implying that learning can and does occur. The positive reinforcement of assurance that learning and even re-learning can occur is a powerful motivator.

Saenger Model Used as the Study Model

Key elements in the study model process were similar and followed a sequence comparable to Atkinson and Mitchell; however, some variations in my process were evident. God had interjected himself, prayer, his word, and his Spirit into my restoration journey. The following represents steps in the progression toward restoration.

1. Acknowledging an awareness of the felt need appeared to be the first step.

Usually when pain becomes unbearable, people are driven to find relief. They know that they are miserable, but may not understand all the "whys" of the misery. They begin to listen to their pain.

2. Choosing someone to listen to the pain is the next step. After people have become aware of their own pain, the loss experienced must be shared, and more importantly, shared in a safe place with a safe person. When trust has been shattered, someone is needed who will come alongside as a faith keeper, a caregiver, a trust bridge,

and a Creator-connector. (These terms reflect the nature of the activities/job descriptions for the one who is chosen to listen.)

3. Lamenting the distress is required. The caregiver provides a safe place for the suffering one to vent without being judged or having feelings minimized. The anger, resentment, hurt, despair, bitterness, unforgiveness, disillusionment, and dismay felt toward God must be honestly expressed.

4. Reframing is accomplished as the caregiver facilitates the evaluation of the benefits of feeling the possible comfort of being restored as compared to the pain that is now present in the distrust. The distrustful mind-set can be reframed as it considers the benefits of trusting God.

5. Taking small steps back toward trusting God represents a less threatening approach. Intentionally, people may choose to trust in small increments by picking a portion of life that feels the least risky and experiment with entrusting it to God. The key concepts are acting with intentionality and choosing small enough increments to feel relatively safe.

6. Observing results produces hopefulness and a reason to proceed. Watching for outcomes of the experiment allows people to see that God is faithful. As they remember and rehearse past experiences where God's faithfulness and trustworthiness were known, they will be encouraged to move ahead.

7. Entrusting larger portions of life to God's care and keeping provides more depth to the experiment. Continuing to choose to trust for more of life, and intentionally keeping track of the results bolsters and encourages people to move toward restoration of trust.

8. Restored trust in God is manifested in a deeper relationship with him. As trust in God is reestablished, evidence of a greater understanding of God emerges. Meaning making regarding the process of restoration, if not in the trauma itself, has occurred. The image of God held before the trauma has been changed as knowledge has been gained through experience.

9. Becoming a Creator-connector or trust bridge appears to be the last step in the model as people share the process with someone else who is suffering the brokenness of distrusting God. This possibility exists with every restoration.

Acknowledging the need. Realizing that broken trust has been the issue in a person's move away from God is the beginning of the restoration process. This awareness, always prompted by the Holy Spirit, can occur in a variety of ways. God has a vested interest in his people. When Jesus prayed to the Father, he prayed for believers:

They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.... Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name.... protect them from the evil one (John 17:8-9, 11, 15, NIV).

The awareness of the danger of distrust comes as a result of Jesus' prayer for the believers' protection. The evil one would like nothing better than to have God's people withdraw from him, angry and disillusioned; however, the Holy Spirit is always working reconciliation within the heart of the believer. Sometimes, this happens internally through a thought that was prompted by sensory input. Sometimes, another believer may confront the person with the truth of distrust through a word of knowledge. Whatever the method used to get the distrusting believers' attention, the significance is that it is God's action on behalf of his people.

When the Holy Spirit enlightens the believer, the distrust must be acknowledged. Usually, the acknowledgment is first to self, then to another, and finally, to God.

Choosing a listener. Finding someone to trust since God is no longer trusted is critical. This person must be willing to listen non-judgmentally. Most professional counselors fit that description, and suffering people often are drawn to that mode of healing. Pastors and Christian counselors, in particular, because of their spiritual connection, seem to be logical candidates for becoming those Creator-connectors, people who act as “Jesus with skin on.”

While many of the participants in this study did choose professional help, all of them also experienced being cared for in this important way by family and friends. The professional label did not necessarily designate the best caregiver or the potential bridge to trusting God again.

Mitchell writes that an important step in her process is to make a decision about whom to choose to trust. Those known longest, even if only through observation, should be considered first when deciding whom to trust. Opportunities for closer observation of these persons and gradual increases in interaction with them may be arranged. The person who is learning to trust again should always be allowed a freedom of choice in the object of his or her trust (849).

Those counselors, whether professionals or not, need to be chosen because the person is able to trust them. Length of time known is important because their track record of trustworthiness insures, to a large degree, the safety for the one who is suffering distrust.

Lamenting honestly. Just as the choice of the most qualified listener is essential, the importance of what is communicated must be considered. The key word here is *honesty*.

“What is in your bucket?” I ask my clients when they come seeking to be relieved of their distress. The phrase, “Your bucket,” refers to how I help people visualize what they are carrying around inside themselves that needs to be dumped out and refilled with something positive.

In his lament, Job was emptying his bucket. He was being brutally honest about his feelings and the pain he was carrying (3:1-3, 6:2, etc.) This action was good for Job, and it is good for people when they are honest with themselves and, especially, with God. Of course, God already knows what is in peoples’ buckets, but healing begins to happen when they are dumped out before him.

The caregiver provides a safe place for the suffering one to vent without being judged or having feelings minimized. The anger, resentment, hurt, despair, bitterness, unforgiveness, disillusionment, and dismay that is felt toward God must be honestly expressed. It must be told, or yelled, or written, but it must be communicated some way. God already knows the burden of suffering the person is carrying, but the one in pain needs to get the emotional baggage outside and be delivered of the pain.

As one’s story is told and heard, care is communicated, and with that care comes “the glimmer of hope!” (Atkinson 105). The caregiver becomes a link to God as he or she listens with love to the whole story and to all of the pain. In the process of listening, opportunities arise for the caregiver to help with the next step: reframing the mind-set against God.

Reframing the pain. Erikson emphasizes that “the re-establishment of a state of trust has been found to be the basic requirement for therapy” (220). The caregiver, chosen by the suffering one, is in a trust position to facilitate reframing the thinking in the person suffering broken trust, and to help answer the question in his or her mind: “Why should I trust again?” Information concerning the negative effects of distrust and the positive effects of trusting needs to be shared. Information provided will give some rationale for trusting (Mitchell 848).

The sufferer has already experienced some of the negative effects of distrusting and needs to be reminded of the benefits of moving back into a trusting mode of thinking. This readjustment of the thinking process is called cognitive restructuring or reframing. The biblical rationale for the importance of using cognitive therapy is contained in the scriptural truth, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7, KJV).

As the Holy Spirit works within the situation, the sufferer is challenged to evaluate the relative safety (but discomfort) of distrust, comparing it with the risk (and possible comfort) of trusting again. The benefits of trusting will begin to outweigh those remaining in his or her present state of mistrust and will provide the motivation toward the process of trust restoration.

In an appropriate time with sensitivity to the suffering one (and after having listened enough to the lament to have gained the right to interject thoughts), the caregiver can help reframe the thinking by providing the link to God. The trust that has been placed in the listening caregiver needs to be transferred to God for a myriad of reasons: dependence issues for the suffering one, “Messiah-complex” issues for the caregiver, and for the restoration of trust in God to occur.

Even as the suffering one chose someone (the caregiver) to trust about whom he or she knew something, consideration must be brought to bear upon challenging the suffering one's thinking in a God-ward direction. Because a correlation exists between knowing someone for a long time and trusting that person, the questions may be posed, "Who has known us the longest?" "Who has created us?" "Who knew us before our own mothers knew us?" Psalm 139 recounts how God knows his own:

O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar.... For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. (KJV)

Wangerin describes this first relationship:

Who can say when, in any child, the dance with God begins? No one. And, the beginning, specifically, cannot be remembered because in the beginning there are no words for it. The language to name, contain, and to explain the experience comes afterward. The dance, then the relationship with God, faithing, begins in a mist. (20)

Sufferers should be encouraged gently to look at God as the One who has known them longest because he created them.

Healing happens as the self moves from a self-curved (i.e., self-referenced) to a God-referenced state of being (Mulholland). To remain self-referenced, thinking, "There is no God and if there is, then he is not the God I thought he was; therefore, he is not to be trusted," leads to believing that only self can be trusted. The mind-set becomes, "I will be God, and I will worship at the altar of self." Self-pity usually accompanies that mind-set, but self-pity and self-worship never accomplish what is hoped they will, namely, to make sufferers feel better. When they realize that what they have been doing is not working, reframing has begun.

Moving toward God. Choosing to select small issues that call for a minimum of trust are a good place to start in moving back into a trusting position. Picking a less risky problem area of life and committing it to God feels less threatening, but choosing to trust him to work in a situation must be practiced. As with any human endeavor, practicing is necessary. Experimenting with trusting God is no exception.

Observing results. As the experiment proceeds, a journal may be kept as results are observed. A written, tangible record that may be viewed and reviewed allows people to see the faithfulness of God accumulate. As daily examples of trustworthiness are recorded and specific data is collected, the results of the experiment begin to be seen.

Watching for specific attributes of God that manifest themselves to the observer contribute to an anticipatory factor that promotes positive thinking and believing. However suspicious the distrustful one may be of God's good nature, there is an inward desire, prompted by the Holy Spirit, to believe that God is good. As the character traits of the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God are anticipated and intentionally noted, the capacity to trust is enlarged. As one watches expectantly for the Helper or the Comforter to guide, teach, or sustain, a selective attentiveness transmits more and more information enabling clarity of perception. As this information base grows, so does trust.

Daily or regular observations of God also may be seen through the reading of his Word (which was, most likely, something that was practiced, at some level, before the trauma occurred) and journaling those insights. Those observations lead to a renewed sense of who God, in relation to his people, is. Like Job, who saw God in a new way as God revealed himself, believers begin to be restored in the same manner. Biblical inputs into the cognitive processes can effectively be incorporated into the trust plan in a

gradual rebuilding process.

As scriptural histories are studied, promises made and kept by God and personal experiences where God has been faithful in the past all make for good, meditative material in the rebuilding of trust. Linn, Fabricant, and Linn write about the importance of rehearsing favorable moments in Israel's history:

Much of scripture is an account of how troubled people receive strength from going back to positive memories.... In the sixth century B.C. Deutero-Isaiah and the Judean people found themselves captive in Babylon, separated from their temple and land. To keep the Judeans from despairing, Isaiah compared their plight with that of their Jewish forefathers in Egypt seven hundred years previously. The early Jews experienced their captivity in Egypt as a time for understanding Yahweh's faithfulness and for forming the bonds of a great Jewish nation. Likewise Deutero-Isaiah challenges the Jewish captives in Babylon to look forward to establishing a deeper relationship with Yahweh and with each other (Is. 41:15; Ex. 14:21) just as had occurred with the Jewish captives in Egypt. (21)

Past disappointments from which there has been recovery, affirmations that life still exists, and recovery from incidents of earlier betrayals of trust may serve to encourage the believer, as well. Patrick D. Miller writes how such recollections aid recovery:

Nowhere does the anguish and Godforsakenness of the afflicted one sound more than in the opening verses of Ps 22. But those cries and questions about God's absence and silence are followed by a recollection of the community story in the past when they trusted; that is, when they cried to God and were saved (vv. 4-5). This psalm suggests that the expressions of confidence are also part of a dialogue with self as despair is fought and countered by memory and trust. (130)

Entrusting more. As trust gradually rises in believers, they may choose to submit larger portions of life to God. As with any experiment, goals and subgoals for trusting may be defined. The expectations, goals, and actual outcomes may be recorded to give a sense of involvement and competence. Specific, observable changes in trusting behavior

since the beginning of the experiment may be noted, as well as reports of the increased incidence of related positive life events.

Gratitude for God's presence begins to grow. Believers realize that, "He has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help" (Ps. 22:24, NIV; see also Ps. 116). The believers find themselves wanting to thank God, instead of ignore him.

As larger portions of life are entrusted to God, assurance is needed to motivate that activity. Citing Heitland, Mitchell writes that "the student [sufferer] must be assured that trust can be learned" (850). As trust is practiced, the truth impacts believers. Not only does learning occur, but they realize that it is the Lord who is teaching them: "Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees" (Ps. 119: 12, NIV). 1 John 2:27 affirms that the Lord is the teacher: "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real,... remain in him" (NIV). Scripture further affirms, "But the Helper, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, all that I have said to you" (John 14:26, NASB). The Holy Spirit comes to teach all things, including how to trust again.

Trusting again. Direct and open communication with God, sharing hurts, disappointments, anger, and distrust, releases negative emotions and gives space for more positive feelings. The choice to be honest about the negative emotions that accompany distrust, promotes a sense of a recycling process in progress. Moments of unguarded sharing of self involving openness, directness, and self-disclosure encourages more trust,

brings about a sense of worth, and establishes interpersonal rapport with God:

Interpersonal rapport is related to self-disclosure, as is trust. Jesus is not only the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2, KJV), he also acts in those capacities of our trust. He discloses himself to believers (John 15:15) and makes God the Father known (John 17:26). He also sends the Holy Spirit to be the believers’ teacher, comforter, enabler, etc. (John 16:13-15, Acts 1:8). As more of the triune God is known, believers also know more about themselves. A simple Celtic prayer acknowledges the work of the Trinity in Christians: “O Father who sought me, O Son who bought me, O Holy Spirit who taught me.” (Johnson).

This relationship is a marvel of trust. Meditating on that mysterious truth, conceives more trust. As believers understand even a small portion of that truth, they begin to see the magnificence of God, how incredibly important to God they are, and his amazing plan for their lives. Wrapping his farewell in trinitarian terms, Jesus shows his trust for believers:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20, NIV)

Becoming Creator-connectors. The last step in the process involves becoming a Creator-connector or a trust bridge. Restoration enables believers to look beyond themselves, once again, and to reach out to others. The suffering they have endured will be used in someone else’s life to encourage that person to trust in God. Their trust will become a bridge to reconnect the suffering to the God of all comfort. Paul, too, expounds in trinitarian terms how the restoration of believers enables the restoration of others:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4, NIV)

I was attending the Life of Prayer class at Asbury during the latter stages of my

involvement with this model. Assigned to conduct a personal prayer experiment during the semester, I focused on choosing to trust God, something I knew I needed to do. Watching the change in my prayer was fascinating as the process progressed. I began by saying, "I don't trust you!" Time would pass, and I would say to God, "I really don't trust you, but I think I want to." More time passed, and my prayer became, "Lord, help me be willing to trust you." Then my prayer became, "Lord, I choose to trust you," and finally, my prayer was simply, "I trust you."

The Lord's guidance through the process brought me to a place of restoration. Now, my prayer has become, "Lord, use me to help someone else learn to trust you again." I hope and pray that my story and the stories contained in this dissertation will be used for the healing of others.

Saenger Model Assumptions

Use of the study model assumes a Christian caregiver (professional or layperson) who is ministering to another Christian suffering from a broken trust in his or her relationship with God. The caregiver and the sufferer have been brought together in this relationship as a result of the sufferer's need being made known to the caregiver. This alliance, based on the sufferer having some degree of trust in the caregiver, may be formed on a professional or an informal basis. Appropriate rapport has been established between the caregiver and the sufferer to serve as the base of operations for the work of a collaborative, healthy therapeutic alliance.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Problem and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore key characteristics that may be present in the process experienced by Christians who, after a trauma, have progressed from a position of distrust in God to a restoration of trust. The study sought to identify restoration reference points that may be used by those who minister to those in the distress caused by trauma and distrust of God. Research analyzed individual cases looking for similarities among individuals who had experienced this process in the hope that some general inferences may be drawn as to what the progressive process from broken trust to restored trust in God may entail. This study was not exhaustive because individual differences in the complexity of humanity prohibit such an endeavor. The Holy Spirit of God also works independently and individually with believers in the restoration process. Human beings are unique creations, and unique solutions to problems must be applied; however, the issue of trust, which is vital to personality development, psychological and spiritual well-being, and the maintenance of relationships, is universal. Meaning making of traumatic events is also a universal issue for humans. The study plumbed participants' perceptions for the meaning making that occurred when undergoing the process under study.

The Project

In this qualitative study, I interviewed adult Christians who had been restored to trust following traumas that left them distrusting God. This project explored common elements in the participants' stories and looked for a predictable order of events in the

restoration of trust process as case studies were compared.

The project employed phenomenological interviewing methods in its effort to observe meaning making and possible patterns among participants in the process under study. Meaning making requires that participants look at their past and their present situation to explore the events that led them to where they are now. Analysis of the collected data, using a color-coded sorting technique, revealed some similarities and some differences that add to the collected body of knowledge on how trust in God is restored.

Research Questions

The research questions that formed the framework of the study provided the structure around which the research interviews were formulated.

Research Question 1

What were the key elements and progressive stages in the process of moving from broken trust in God back to a restored trust?

Research Question 2

In what ways did the experiences of the participants correspond to the trust restoration model that developed?

Research Question 3

Did a significant deepening of the level of trust in God occur in the process?

Methodology

Research requires a method by which to do inquiry. My research was best served by employing the qualitative research method.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative research method of interviewing individual subjects was used to research key characteristics or patterns in the study. Weirisma describes qualitative research:

[The method] does not emphasize a theoretical base for whatever is being studied at the beginning of the research,... [but] a theory may develop as the research is conducted. It is basically inductive, holistic inquiry that is context specific. It involves the researcher becoming the primary research instrument. (204)

This methodology better accesses the subjective dynamics of a person's values, beliefs, feelings, and meaning making of life's circumstances, but it presents a challenge to the researcher to interpret accurately the qualitative data he or she collects.

Validity of qualitative research. Qualitative research, to have any real value and validity, must be able to overcome a number of "insidious biases that can steal into the process of drawing conclusions" (Denzin and Lincoln, Handbook 438). These biases in analysis include such elements as the researcher's impact on the setting, the values of the researcher, the truth of a respondent's account (Silverman, Interpreting 156). A number of other biases deal with the handling of the data which include skewing the analysis, considering some data as more salient because of their emotional or dramatic impact, and overconfidence in some data when trying to confirm a key finding (Denzin and Lincoln, Handbook 438). These threats to valid research are addressed through the use of triangulation.

Triangulation. Triangulation is a research strategy that employs a combination of multiple methods to add "rigor, breadth, and depth" to any investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, Collecting 4). Norman K. Denzin, a "major early advocate" (Silverman,

Interpreting 156) of triangulation, identifies four basic types:

- 1) *Data triangulation*: the use of a variety of data sources in a study.
- 2) *Investigator triangulation*: the use of several different researchers or evaluators.
- 3) *Theory triangulation*: the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data.
- 4) *Methodological triangulation*: the use of multiple methods to study a single problem. (Denzin and Lincoln, Strategies 46).

Uwe Flick further explains Denzin's data triangulation by adding that phenomena under study should be done at different dates, times, places, and from different persons.

Investigator triangulation employs different observers or interviewers to detect or minimize biases resulting from the researcher as a person. Theory triangulation places various theoretical points of view side-by-side to approach data with multiple perspectives and hypotheses in mind. Methodological triangulation differentiates within-method and between-method triangulation. An example of the within-method triangulation is to combine the questionnaire with a semi-structured interview (229-30).

Denzin has since added interdisciplinary triangulation, which uses other disciplines such as art, history, anthropology, etc., to inform the research process. In 1994, with the publication of Handbook of Qualitative Research, Denzin and Yvonna D. Lincoln propose a different paradigm for validity:

The central image for "validity" for postmodernist texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central image is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach.... What we see depends upon our angle of repose.... Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. (522).

Triangulation is a term with multiple meanings. For this study, several sources will be explored to increase the expressiveness of the data gathered: interviews with the

participants, biblical/theological analysis, and psychological foundations.

Solicitation and sampling. Following committee approval of my project, I sought the support of J. D. Walt, the Vice President for Community Life of Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS), who, in turn, asked me to contact Anthony Shelton, ATS Director of Student Life. Potential participants within the Asbury community were solicited by a confidential letter from Shelton that accompanied my solicitation letter (see Appendix A).

One of Shelton's duties at ATS is to provide counseling assistance to students. Since he knew of students who fit the criteria I was seeking for the study, he volunteered to contact them and have them contact me, if they were interested in participating, thereby insuring confidentiality. He verified my student standing, and assured those to whom he sent both letters that the research was being done under the authorization of the Student Life Department and the Doctor of Ministry program. His solicitation for participants included information about this study. The research was described, defining criteria for participation, so that respondents were able to determine if they met the research criteria: participants had to be 22 years of age or older, had to have experienced a trauma that resulted in a broken trust of God, and had later been restored to a trust position with God. The process of moving from broken trust to a restoration of trust in God would be explored through the use of two tape recorded interviews. Participants were told that they could leave the study, at any time, if they so chose.

Convenience sampling (availability) was used with the seminary participants, and snowball sampling (sampling participants who have been recommended by others who knew of the study) was used for the selection of participants outside the seminary.

Prospects from the seminary responded by phone or email and were quickly contacted and scheduled for the initial visit which allowed becoming acquainted before the actual interviews were conducted (see Appendix B). I contacted the other prospects who were referred to me and related all the information, arranged initial visits, etc.

Interviews. Screening prior to subject selection verified that each participant had been through the process of distrust in God following a significant trauma and had subsequently moved back into a position of restored trust in God. Semi-structured interviews were tape recorded, and analysis was handled through a sorting technique.

Generally, the semi-structured interviews (see Appendixes D and E) followed the Dolbeare and Schuman interview model with a prescribed set of questions to which each subject responded (Seidman 11). Permission to tape the interview and consent to volunteer for the study was gained through the use of a signed informed consent form (see Appendix C) (Glesne 116).

Confidentiality. Measures to insure confidentiality were discussed with all prospective participants, and confidentiality was maintained for each through the use of pseudonyms in the written text and transcribed material from the taped interviews. Each participant was renamed and identified only by a first name as portions of their stories appear in Chapter 4. All tape recordings of subjects were either destroyed after the project was completed or returned to the individual participants if they wished to keep them.

Field testing. Field testing checked interview questions for clarity and content. Three people, chosen at random, who had no previous knowledge of this study, critiqued all instruments for reliability in format, content, and for clarity in language. The

solicitation letter, the informed consent form, and the research interview protocols were reviewed. The feedback was incorporated into all of these instruments.

The interview protocols and the revised instrumentation methodology required further feedback. A pilot field test was done with a single participant using the complete research methodology (with the exception of the interview protocol for the second session). All instruments were reviewed, and the interview protocol for session 1 was conducted. Further refining of the methodology resulted, and another field test with the same participant was done using the interview protocol for session 2. Field testing feedback from both interview sessions was incorporated into the final research protocol.

Population and Subjects

Ten students at Asbury Theological Seminary and two believers from a local church composed the study population. A targeted number of twelve Christian men and women, at least 22 years of age, who met the study criteria, were interviewed. The mean age was 35; the youngest participant was 23, and the oldest was 75. Eight females and four males participated. Educational levels were fairly homogenous. All of the ATS participants were either graduate students in the Master of Divinity or the Master of Arts in Counseling programs, and the other subjects held postgraduate degrees, one a Ph.D. in education. Two of the subjects were retired from professions, one of them was a pastor.

Instrumentation

The twelve participants volunteered for two sixty-minute, tape recorded, semi-structured interviews. The tape recordings were transcribed.

Following the first session in preparation for the second, handouts were given to each participant to review the session 2 interview questions. They were asked to make

notes as they thought about each question so that information about their process would be more complete.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interactive technique of data collection was used. I interacted with the participant being observed. Oral histories were collected and field notes were kept of personal reflections, thoughts, and observations about the data being collected and the ongoing research process.

The interview protocols were designed to elicit responses that targeted commonalities and differences in the process (see Appendixes D and E). The interviews were standardized according to the semi-structured interview questions so that every participant was asked the same questions. Ordering of the questions varied as some participants became so involved in the telling of their stories that I had difficulty keeping to the ordered script; however, I made every effort to insure that the interview questions were answered, regardless of order, so that the study would be comparative and reliable. I hoped that generalizable inferences could be drawn from the results.

The interviews were scheduled, conducted, tape recorded, transposed, and analyzed for similarities and differences in response, looking at the data for themes that corresponded to the research questions. After typing the data collected (223 pages of single-spaced typewritten verbatim), I read and reread the material picking out themes that ran through it. The next series of readings pulled material from each participant's transcript, and I color coded similar themes, further reducing the useable portions of the interviews that matched different elements within the researched process (Mason 111). For example, interview quotes that had to do with the theme "Image of God" were color

coded orange.

I kept a research journal for field notes about the interviewing process and the participants' reactions in sessions. My field notes served as a resource for analysis of observations about personal adherence to research protocol that I made about myself in conducting the interviews. I found moments that presented themselves when the temptation was strong to lapse into my own counseling mode; however, having the research protocol kept me from straying.

Delimitations and Generalizability

This study focused on a convenience and snowball sampling of voluntary participants from among students in the Asbury Theological Seminary community and believers within a local church. Often, people come to seminary as a result of having been brought closer to God (many times through trauma) and having experienced a call on their lives to serve him. As one may then expect, within the seminary community I found a number of subjects who had experienced broken trust/distrust in God and a subsequent restoration process.

While the choice for seminary life is often made following such a process of restoration, because of life's vicissitudes, Christians may experience multiple cycles of this process whether or not they are in seminary. Since trust is universally foundational to the relationship they have with God, this study should be generalizable to a wider population because the whole Christian community is subject to this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Bad things do happen to good people, even professing Christians. The purpose of the research interviews was to observe how Christians survive the destruction of their trust in God, following a trauma, and then come back to a place of restoration. These twelve stories give witness to the power of God to sustain spiritual life in the midst of tragedy and trauma and to restore the broken to a deeper trust relationship with him. That restoration was marked by an increase in trust as perceptions about God were changed. Participants experienced what Job experienced when he came to the place of restoration: while his questions were not necessarily answered, still he gained a new image of God.

Summary of Participants' Stories

Since I have used portions of the participants' stories in all the elements of the study model, a brief summary of their traumas is in order. Having this information at the beginning of this chapter provides a more comprehensive view of the study model. The traumas that were experienced were varied: divorce of parents that left feelings of insignificance and self-doubt, accidental deaths, suicides of family members, blindness, medical conditions for which no cure could be found, sexual abuse, feelings of being abandoned by God, burnout from spiritual abuse, the loss of an important relationship, sexual purity, threatened self-worth, and an automobile accident. Varied as these traumas are, they represent the complexities of living as a human being in a fallen world. Renamed participants are listed with a brief description about the trauma each one suffered.

Megan's parents divorced when she was a child leaving her with feelings of

insignificance and self-doubts. A relationship with a man triggered fear that had been repressed since childhood. Her distrust focused more on people than it did on God.

Emily's health was compromised when she was a baby, leaving her with severe medical problems. When God did not answer her prayers for healing, she thought he was not trustworthy.

Rebecca grew up being sexually abused by her father and emotionally neglected by her mother. Dealing with memories of the abuse led her to seek healing for those memories and damaged emotions. She spent years seeking God and peace through much experimentation with drugs, Eastern religions, philosophy, and being involved in civic and social action groups.

Tom's only son was severely burned in a horse-barn fire. He died the next day. The tragedy left Tom in a clinically depressed state that required years of therapy and included shock treatments.

Lucy was involved in a serious relationship and became sexually involved, thinking she would marry the man. The aftermath of their break-up left her grieving the loss of him, her dreams for them, and her purity.

Connie lost her trust in God following the death of a child for whom she had prayed for five days. Her mother was driving to pick up Connie from school and ran into the child. The accident and resultant death produced severe depression in her mother and had serious repercussions for Connie's emotional and mental health. The family did not talk about the tragedy.

Barbara was a victim of spiritual abuse. She finally experienced burnout and was able to escape the Christian ministry that had abused her. After having given her all to

Christ in self-sacrifice, she felt betrayed when God did not protect her.

Chet is a retired pastor who became blind. He experienced depression. His story is one of coming to terms with his blindness.

Abby's mother committed suicide. Abby was left feeling abandoned by God and by her mother.

Joe was unable to make decisions because of his perfectionism. Family expectations of his becoming all that God wanted him to be had paralyzed him. He believed that God had let him down by not providing direction when asked.

John thought that God did not answer his prayers the way that John had expected him to do. An automobile accident that could have killed him changed his perceptions of God and his feelings about trusting God, instantly.

One Participant's Story

Annie's story provides an in-depth example of the process of restoration. Annie grew up surrounded by Christians practicing their faith. She remembered praying before meals and her father reading the Bible. She lived an idyllic Christian life. She was always in church on Sundays and Wednesdays and was involved in every kind of venue for children, e.g., Sunday school, vacation Bible school, and Girls in Action. She attended a very large church, which was the center of the family's life. Her memories of childhood vacations and time spent together reflect a family with close ties. "I grew up in a fairly peaceful home where there was a lot of intimacy, especially between my father and me."

She studied the Scriptures and she "grew to faith in Christ and understood more of what it meant that Jesus lived and died." The church was somewhat moderate in its theological stance, but "I was hearing the word of God." That church and its clergy later

played a major role in the brokenness or disconnect of trust in God when her idyllic family life ended with the suicide of the oldest child, Annie's brother.

"Our whole family was just shattered. I don't even know how we survived. The family just about disintegrated." All of the survivors of the suicide, and especially her parents who held very public positions, suffered much shame and stigma. "It was God's grace and mercy that no other children in the family did the same [suicide] and that my parents somehow managed to stay married." People would ask, "How could that happen?" as if her parents were at fault. Others would declare that her brother was in hell. When the ministers from her church visited her home, the youth pastor said, "Well, at least he was baptized," to which the senior pastor replied, "Well, that's not enough!" Annie's faith was very connected to her ministers and her church. The suicide left her feeling like her family was "completely outcast, condemned by God and by these leaders who were making comments like that!"

Annie was thirteen. "Most kids of thirteen are playing with their Barbie Dream House or whatever, and I felt my childhood ended. I was trying to cope with stuff that most adults have difficulty coping with." Her reaction to the tragedy was "horrible anger, shame, confusion, and lots of loneliness." She tried to continue her life as it had been before, but began to think God did not exist. "Then," she said, "I just totally rejected the Lord. I didn't consciously say that I didn't believe in God anymore, but I just rejected God. I rebelled." Six years followed filled with depression, failing in school when she had been an honor student, teenage drinking, and, in her words, "debauchery."

Not knowing how angry she was with God, Annie took out her anger on her parents. Assuming they were negligent, she blamed them for her brother's death. "I was

doing to them what the rest of the community was doing to them.” Nevertheless, her father continued to reach out to her with unconditional love:

I really needed to feel that! Even though I was failing at school and my parents didn’t even know where I had been for the past twenty-four hours, my dad would come in to me and want to take me to lunch so that we could talk. That was really powerful. I realized later that I saw Christ in my father but, at the time, I still had this part of me that was distrustful that anyone would want to continue a relationship with me because of my behavior. His love went a long way in making me believe that God would be that way, too.

At the age of nineteen, she was walking home at six o’clock one morning following a party when she realized that she had not believed in God all those years. Although she was hung over, she began to think how she had believed as a child and how important that belief had been to her:

How can I be such two completely different people? There was something in me that wanted to go back to that relationship with Christ so badly. I just didn’t know why God would want someone who so completely spit in his face. I had rejected everything he did!

As she walked and thought, she made an intentional commitment. “I knew it [what she had believed about God] was the truth, and so, I thought, ‘I will never be hung over again. I will never, with the help of God!’” Half-trustingly she added, “If you [Christ] are really there!”

Annie was still angry with God and with her parents and wanted to self-medicate, nurse her wounds, and try to meet her own needs. She “longed to feel the presence of the Lord” that she had experienced before her brother’s death and immediately following it, when in the numbed grief state of shock “the Lord had provided comfort like I had never known.” The change did not happen overnight, but she knew at that point that she could come back to God:

I felt that the Lord still loved me in spite of all that I had done. I don't know if I can say what brought me back, except that it was the Lord and things started changing. People started saying to me, "You are different!"

Annie went through a supernatural process of healing:

Being convicted by the Holy Spirit of her sin, asking forgiveness, and receiving forgiveness.... It wasn't something I was doing. As soon as I turned back to him, he was there. I saw my relationship was being restored with God. I was being cleansed. I was giving him my life to be put back in order.

Annie's story is just one of the twelve stories told to me during my interviews with the participants of this study. Her story is an excellent example of the persons in the study: professing Christians who had a trust relationship with God and who experienced something traumatic that broke that trust. In between that brokenness and the restoration of trust in God lies hidden a process that this study sought to discover.

Each of the twelve stories was remarkable in its own right, and excerpts from each are related as the process of restoration is unfolded in this chapter. Data gathered from the twenty-four interviews (two per each participant) that were conducted revealed a process by which these persons were brought back into a trust relationship with God.

Gender, Age, Race, and Education

The twelve Christians chosen for this study were four Caucasian males and eight Caucasian females, ranging in age from 23 to 75 years of age. The mean age was 35. All of the participants had either completed or were involved in graduate studies, one at the doctoral level. Ten of the twelve were Asbury Theological Seminary students who volunteered to share their stories with me. The other two participants were members of the church I attend.

Faith Development

Most of the participants (eleven of the twelve) came from Christian homes and practiced their faith as little children. As evidence of the trust they held in God before the trauma, they cited such things as praying and believing that God was listening, reading and memorizing Scripture, being active in children's groups and in youth groups, faithfully attending church services, and making decisions for Christ. For example, Emily remembered her moment of conversion:

I do remember when I was about five because my dad would read the Bible to me every night, and one night he specifically asked me if I wanted Jesus to come and live in my heart. I thought he was already there, so Dad and I talked about that. At that time I had the visualization that he would actually come into my chest to live, so then I just prayed and asked Jesus into my heart. I guess that I don't ever remember a time of not knowing him, but there was that kind of formal decision point.

Megan, another participant, responded that she could remember "feeling this sense of peace knowing that there was a God greater than I was who cared for me intimately. I think it showed through the love of my parents."

These examples validate the developmental theories of Fowler and Gillespie. Fowler postulates that faith takes form in the earliest relationships with those who provide faithful care in infancy. Trusting becomes a response to an acknowledgment of fidelity (Stages 4). Gillespie proposes that in early childhood, God's trustworthiness is modeled as parents provide basic trustworthiness in the home (54).

Rebecca's story, however, runs counter to these theories on faith development. Her childhood was marked by sexual abuse by her father and emotional neglect by her mother. Even though her earliest memories were driven by fear, she still came to know the Lord because her mother took her and her brother to Sunday school. "They told me

about Jesus, and I believed in him and I had a relationship with him. I became a student of the Bible.” Later, however, faith waned as she attended confirmation class. When her “liberal pastor told us that the Bible wasn’t true,” and when she could not synthesize what she knew about Genesis and the story of creation with evolutionary theory, she was unable to hold on to her religion. Probably a bigger factor contributing to her growing agnosticism was that she had been “wrestling with the truth of the Bible on an emotional level, wondering if God really did care about me. He wasn’t answering my prayers that my father would quit abusing me and get me out of that situation.” Nevertheless, through all of the negative aspects of her childhood, she held on to the truth that “God is good and that Jesus is the son of God, and somehow or another I had a connection with him.” Those core beliefs, instilled by Sunday school teachers and not by parents, held her through years of seeking God, even though she “gave up on Christianity as practiced because I didn’t see anyone really benefiting from it.” Years later after much experimentation with drugs, Eastern religions, meditation, study of philosophy, and working with civil rights and social causes to bring about justice, she would come to think that “maybe the Lord was drawing me to him.” She became friends with a “vibrant, compassionate, and joyful Christian and decided to give Christianity another try.”

Symptoms of Diminished Trust

Theodicy was a major consideration by all participants as they tried to make meaning from their traumas. They questioned why a God who loved them would allow such terrible things to happen in their lives. Most of them voiced a feeling of being cheated or of being disillusioned because their expectations of God were dashed. Some expressed believing they had a certain sense of entitlement because they were such “good

people” and God had no business allowing bad things to happen to them. Tom recounted his anger at God:

I, like most people going through the stages of grief, blamed God like, “Why did you do this to me?” I just couldn’t understand how somebody who was brought up in the church by Christian parents, [pause] not that I hadn’t done things I was sorry for but you know I hadn’t committed any terrible crimes, [pause] I thought I was a pretty good fellow. I thought that anybody who would do what he [God] did was not to be trusted and did not care about me as a human being.

Lucy reflected about her feelings toward God before the trauma:

God was a good friend. I saw him as loving me, but it was dependent on what I was doing. I felt like I deserved his love because I was a good girl. I think I really believed that the Lord was blessing me because I was being obedient. I felt like there was a reciprocal arrangement between us where I did this and this and he, in turn, loved me because I gave him reason to love me.

Megan, whose parents divorced, asserted that she trusted God more than the people who had betrayed her trust. She said, “I had more trouble dealing with people than I did with God because I know God is perfect and I know God loves me.” Amazingly, the doubts that she had about people’s untrustworthiness did not transfer to God; however, that was not the usual case in this study. Participants shut down emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Some dropped out of church. Some dropped out of life for a while through depression and comfort-seeking behaviors. Anger, disillusionment, betrayal, and a sense of being cheated out of what was deserved permeated their existence. Hurt so deep that it needed to be repressed imprisoned them because there were no resources to deal with the pain until later in life.

The Saenger Restoration of Trust Model

The study model for the process of restoration used as the hypothesis for this research is an amalgamation from three sources: Atkinson’s phases based on the book of

Job; Mitchell's research in a secular setting, using one subject, to restore trust in an adolescent student whose trust had been broken; and, personal experience based on my own restoration process. The findings of the study appear to support the study model in that each participant experienced most of the elements within the model in a defined sequence. Generally, the model held with slight variations.

The Applied Study Model

The nine steps of the study model were (1) acknowledging the need; (2) choosing a listener; (3) lamenting honestly; (4) reframing the pain; (5) moving toward God; (6) observing results; (7) entrusting more; (8) restoring trust; and, (9) becoming Creator-connectors. The study model was applied to each participant. Examination of participants' examples demonstrated in the key elements of the model revealed the validity of each concept and added clarity and direction for those who are called to minister to those who suffer distrust in God.

Acknowledging the Need

Megan became aware of trust issues within herself that triggered fear when a relationship with a young man began and she was unable to communicate her feelings. She wondered if she could ever love someone enough to marry him:

I don't want to get married because I don't want to end up like my parents. I would rather be single and happy for the rest of my life than divorced and miserable. That realization brought me to the point of recognizing a need for healing in my life. There were issues in my heart and mind, some that were a part of the divorce. Those questions prompted internal questions of the love of God and God's love for me. What happened between my parents had me questioning my own life and love and trusting God with being able to love another person.

As awareness of the need is discovered, the self begins to seek integration and to examine the causes for the distress. Confrontation is sometimes necessary to

accommodate awareness. Emily demonstrated the importance of confrontation, when after several sessions of listening and praying with her, her caregiver gently admonished her:

He told me that he thought I did not really trust God! I looked at him with my mouth hanging open because I was at a Christian college and I was involved in all these Christian ministries, and I had been a Christian since I was five and had always followed God. I thought, "What are you talking about that I don't trust God?" He asked me to think about it and come back later and talk about it if I wanted to, but he added that he wanted me to talk to God about it. Well, I didn't want to talk to God about it because you don't want to talk to the people you are mad at! [Laughter.] The more I thought about it and as I kind of grudgingly got into a dialog with God, I realized that was the problem.

Choosing a Listener

Professional caregivers, ministers and counselors, were sought by nine of the twelve participants to alleviate their distress. Comments from two of the participants supported this key element of choosing someone to listen. "Going to counseling was actually the first big step I took." "Going to counseling was the first intentional choice I made." A pastor helped Megan realize that her damaged emotions and the real hurt in her life that she had repressed following her parents' divorce. Tom credited another pastor as being the most helpful to him:

He helped me verbalize my feelings. He listened to me rage at God. He would listen to all my ranting and raving and then he would say, "God didn't do this!" He talked to me about God. He had some good thoughts. It wasn't the preachy kind of thing; he just pitched them out to you and let you mull them over. Then we would discuss them the next time we met.

Choosing someone to listen to the lament was critically important. Professionals were not the only choices that participants made. Many of them related that while counseling was sought from a professional and the relationship produced growth friendships played a major role in the reconnections with the Lord. The following

comments by several of the participants made that point: "I feel that going to people and getting encouragement from them helped me to go back and trust God." "I believe that people stepped into that distance between God and me. They really helped me to heal by helping me along and letting me be me." "People who listened to me and people who loved me: they are the ones who made a difference."

Connie reported what she learned in the process of sharing anger:

I guess that only the Lord can heal you, because at any point [of the restoration] if anyone would have tried to step in too far and fix it, I would have resented it. If someone makes themselves your healer, then they are actually getting in the way of your trusting the Lord. She [Connie's friend who came alongside her] gave me the freedom and the space to be wherever I was, believing that the Lord would restore my heart. She gave me enough space to allow the Lord to do whatever he wanted to do but stayed close enough to speak truth to me and to be an example of love, which was never pushy. To love and walk with the one but never to assume that you're the only one that can do it is what's needed.

Some people, however, inhibited the process. Not knowing what to say, some made incredibly insensitive comments following deaths that occurred. "This was God's will for this to happen." "He's in a better place." These remarks were reminiscent of those made by Job's well-meaning friends to whom the besieged Job responded, "How long will you torment me and crush me with words?" (19:1, NIV). Some people, in their ignorance or fear of adding further hurt and discomfort, avoided saying anything at all. The non-acknowledgement of the death and the silence were as painful as the thoughtless remarks.

Other participants entrusted their stories to people they thought were trustworthy only to be betrayed as their confidentiality was broken, compounding the misery and anger. Lucy was able to confront the person who had betrayed her trust, but she "will never again be able to trust her." That issue of confidentiality was addressed as

participants were enlisted for this study. Nevertheless, as I share their stories and change their names to protect them, I am consciously aware of the need to honor their confidences and not betray the trust they placed in me.

Whether the chosen caregiver is a professional or not makes little difference: being able to help deliver the pain through the process of venting was the essential desired outcome. (Perhaps, the caregiver's title should be "midwife" to reflect the concept of facilitating delivery.) Regardless of the title, listening, responding appropriately, and keeping confidences were the qualities present that made venting possible for the suffering one.

Lamenting Honestly

The key word here is *honesty*. All of the participants reported that this particular part of the process was required. Barbara declared, "Trust began in God again by telling him how much I didn't trust him and to be completely honest with how much I didn't trust him. I felt betrayed by someone I had loved." Other stories of honest expressions of anger poured forth during the interviews. In many instances, deep emotion was triggered as they remembered how they felt, even though restoration had now taken place. Emily spoke animatedly:

I was in so much pain that it kind of changed my personality. There was that grief that I wasn't the same person anymore and knowing that I was probably never going to be the same person again. I had lost myself. I hated God for giving me this body! And there it was! I didn't realize it until I said it and then I kind of went, "Oh, that's the root of the problem, right there!" I was mad at God and hadn't realized it until I said it. I cried a lot, "I am too young for this! I am too young to be having these serious medical problems and to have to be in pain all the time!" Once I finally learned how to be honest with God about my feelings, there was a time period where all I did was yell at him all the time! "What do you mean that no one can fix this? What do you mean that I am going to have to learn to deal with this for the rest of my life?" I stopped reading the Bible

because it is so funny how your relationship with God is really like a relationship with a person like, "I'm mad at you and I don't want to talk to you! I don't want to see you, I am just going to ignore you. I don't know if I want to do this whole Christian faith thing anymore because you may be the truth, but you are mean. I don't know if I want to be a part of this anymore. So, I am just going to not be friends until I can figure out what's going on!" I never doubted that he [God] was there. I doubted that he cared or loved me. I thought he was burying me. I never doubted that he existed; I just doubted his general character.

Chet suffered depression and blamed God for his blindness. He thought he was being punished. "And it also went through my head that if God was trying to teach someone else something through this, then work on them instead of me! Leave me alone!" Abby declared, "I was really angry at God. I said 'God, we prayed for so long and I trusted you with this [her mother's salvation]. Why did I even pray? Why did I even ask others to pray? Why should I pray about anything?'" Tom thought God was unfair:

God, you are unfair! Why didn't you take that little "snot-nosed" boy who started the fire instead of my son. He had five or six brothers and sisters. This is my only son! Why didn't you take the other little boy?

Often tears appeared during the interviews as participants looked back on those painful periods of their lives and remembered their distress. Emotions, though tempered by time, were stirred. Grief catches people unaware and surprises them. Being aware that my role in the interview was to be the objective listener, I would sometimes find myself in tears. My objectivity came face-to-face with such intense anguish, and I wept with those who wept. Although several difficult times arose during some interviews, all of the participants expressed appreciation for having had the opportunity to tell their story and to cry, if necessary. Perhaps my tears affirmed them in some way, or perhaps that is my rationalization for indulging my humanity and momentarily losing a researcher's objectivity. When I looked back at my field notes from these incidences, I was reminded

that I would opt again for my subjective humanity to surface and to lament with them.

Shared grief connected in those precious moments.

Reframing the Pain

Before change can occur and healing can happen, victim mentality and faulty thinking need to be addressed. Psychologists use the terminology of *reframing* to define the cognitive process of how a person may come to a new way of thinking about an event. That new thinking, then, can produce behavioral or attitudinal changes. In these study cases, the mind-sets of self-pity or self-worship and faulty theology needed transformation. Scripture says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2, NIV). The cognitive theorists in psychology place their hopes for their clients in such transformations as people deal with the challenges of negative self-talk and other faulty cognitions.

Reframing occurred for all of the study participants. Perhaps the most dramatic and fastest reframing happened in a matter of minutes. John was involved in an automobile accident where he could have been killed instantly:

It was more of an instantly coming into a trust position. One minute in my head I had an expletive in the forefront of my tongue and a minute later I am flat on my back in the field and someone is trying to help me. I’ve got a hymn going on through my head, and I can’t remember the words, but they are there. And I had a smile on my face. I was covered with blood and I must have looked awful,... but there was just something peaceful there. I don’t know why God had saved me and the word blessed just doesn’t hold the same meaning anymore. I wish every person could experience that feeling of blessing without having to go through the pain. I thought, “I’m dead!” then, “I’m alive! Sort out the pieces later!”

Most people do not go through the process of reframing so quickly. John had moved from a mind-set where God was not playing by the rules that John had established to a position of trusting him for his future:

I didn't think that God was being honest and fair with me. I had really wrestled with God about what I am supposed to do. I would pray to God to please show me! "Writing it in the sky would be nice!" [Laughter] It went from me not trusting him because of myself to trusting him but not knowing what I am entrusting. Now, I am entrusting my life, my future, but not knowing where that's going and not knowing what the intention is.

Joe, another participant, had great difficulties in coming to terms with his perfectionism and indecisiveness. He had been raised in a Christian home where his family had placed great expectations upon his life. His mother wanted him to become a minister. Because he felt so much pressure to conform to the expectations, he was almost paralyzed about making any decision. He kept asking the Lord to direct him and did not think he ever received an answer.

His reframing occurred within the counseling milieu and among friends. He said about himself, "I realized that I was putting too much pressure on myself, and as a result I was indecisive on everything because I had to be perfect in every decision, and I couldn't fail in anything." The mind-set of fear of failure kept him locked inside a prison of frustration, discontentment, and inability to try to do what he wanted to do. His underlying faulty thinking was, "If you don't try, then you can't fail!"

Joe readjusted his thinking patterns to realize that he could not "just sit there and worry about it forever." When he is now confronted by the need to make a decision, he goes to Christ first and really includes him. Then he "uses his best judgment and goes with it":

If I make a mistake, then I make a mistake. I can't be perfect and that's OK. I will think this is what I am going to do, and Christ is in control. Even if something is not right, it's OK. I say to the Lord, "You're in control, and I give this to you."

Readjusting thinking patterns allows taking the risk to trust again. All of the

participants experienced this kind of alteration in their thinking. Connie remembers choosing to believe that God is good:

In spite of my not understanding how you [God] acted or did not act, I will still choose to believe that you are good and that you were with me during that time whether I feel that way or not. I am done being angry. I am going to choose the truth about you and believe that you did not abandon me during that time and you never will.

In my own case, I can remember thinking, "I don't trust God! But if I don't trust God, then who can I trust? He is the only show in town!" That truth, that God who created me is the only God I can trust, propelled me into the next element of the process.

Moving toward God

As thinking changes, small steps toward trusting may be taken. Risking trust is no longer so formidable a prospect. Where once anger and fear motivated thoughts and behavior, a sense of hope moves in to act as arbitrator between "what was" and "what may be."

Choosing to trust in small increments is the believers' part to play in this restoration. It becomes a matter of being willing to trust in whatever tiny measures they can risk. As they submit their will to God and place in his keeping some small element of their lives, they are well on the road to trusting. Annie, whose trust in the church had been shaken along with her trust in God, made the choice to try out a church service:

It wasn't like I was going to go in and drill these people, but subconsciously I wanted to see how it was playing out. Is this for real? So I started going to an evening service to see what goes on and then what are people saying. Were they accepting or were they like the monsters in my mind that my childish view had? I was reassured a little: maybe the community of Christ can be loving and accepting. So God put me into a church where I really saw that. I was blown away. It was very big for me. It was real!

Fear is the enemy of trusting. Marilyn said, "Sometimes I am still afraid to trust

for the fear that is in me. I think it's giving up control and intentionally choosing to say, 'I will trust you in all these areas, not just these areas.'" She admits that the difficult part is "giving over every single aspect of life." The biggest fear for Marilyn is that God will take someone else dear from her. "But I know that he is a good God and that he works the best for me, yet I hold back.... Maybe it's just being human."

Echoing Marilyn's fear, Chet said of his trust in God, "I trust him but I just wonder what the sucker's going to do to me next!" Annie added, "I can trust better for myself than for my children! It is difficult to make a decision to go back on the mission field when you have children to consider." Yet, bit-by-bit, inch-by-inch, fear was conquered as trust grew and the choice was made to bite off more and more of life and entrust it to God.

Observing Results

Experiments call for an observation of results. The experiment of trusting also calls for such an observation. Watching expectantly after the choice was made to trust God for a particular need, however small, provided impetus to observing if God was trustworthy and propelled the believer to trust for other needs. Observations took the forms of journaling and reading God's Word, where looking inside the self revealed the healing and restoration in progress. Answers to prayer and the ministry of people who provided encouragement at "just the right moment" also served as ways to observe that God could be trusted. Regardless of the method used, the important activity was to observe God's faithfulness and to remember and rehearse past experiences where his faithfulness was evident.

Journaling. Journaling is an important tool for making comparisons between the “before and the after self.” Journaling the struggle was a source of revelation for Megan. She stated, “I started journaling with prayer, seeking the Lord, saying, ‘I don’t know that I can remember all of this, but I know there’s something there.’ It helped me discover the real source of my pain.” Also, Abby said, “Journaling helped me get out my questions to God.”

Journaling a personal history with God can be encouraging and illuminating to the path now being traveled. If a journal has not been kept, God can reveal what is stored up in that magnificent computer he created, the brain. Remembering times when God’s trustworthiness has been demonstrated prompts renewed anticipation and hopefulness for the future.

Reading the Word. Scripture spoke to many of the participants of this study. Annie remembered a small book with Scripture that she had when she was a child. She found it and began to read:

It would speak to me so much, and I would start to believe it. I would read that Scripture and live with it. Those were baby steps. Believing the word was a big part of beginning to trust him again. Scripture played a really important part in coming back to trusting God. If Scripture wasn’t involved in this process, I don’t think I would have gotten very far. Something about the power of being able to really believe the word of God was huge.

Lucy found comfort in the words from Psalm 42. Over and over, she would repeat these words: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Ps. 42:5, NIV). She reasoned that she wanted to believe that God cared about her:

It was obvious that David struggled a lot. He questioned God and was angry and was frustrated with God. But at the very end, he always had that

hope and still believed in God despite all his doubts and fear. Because I knew that this was written by a man with whom I now identify because of what I've been through, [pause] I recognized that even though I felt that God wasn't there and didn't care, I really wanted to believe that he did care and was there.

Other participants commented about their use of the Bible: Connie was in Bible study even though she consciously did not care about God, but she “wanted to look good for other people.” Abby made herself continue to seek God through his Word even though she confessed she did not want to:

I didn't want to go to church, pray, or hang out with my Christian friends,... but I continued to hang out and go to church and to read my Bible even when I didn't want to. It seems like for me the more I did it, the more I trusted God. It was the only thing I knew to do in my confusion.

Looking back, both Connie and Abby saw how God had used that time in the Word to bring about their restoration.

Entrusting More

Observations of God's faithfulness and trustworthiness are evidenced in his Word and in his people. As those observations are made, the self seems to make two piles in the mind. One is called the “trauma pile,” and on that pile all the pain suffered is placed. The other pile is the “God is good pile,” and on that pile is mounted evidence upon evidence of God's trustworthiness until it stands much higher than the trauma pile. As the evidence continues to mount, intentional choices are made to experiment further and to entrust larger portions of life to God. Again, observations are made and records kept of the results of trusting. When the suffering one can again recognize that God is indeed good and can be trusted, restoration has happened.

Trusting Again

Findings of the study revealed that with restoration a deeper relationship of trust

in God was established. Meaning making had occurred in the process, if not in the trauma itself. While some participants continued having difficulty understanding the why of the trauma, they all perceived that God had done something in them through the process. The image of God once held before the trauma was changed as more knowledge of God's character was gained through the experience. Joe commented on the change:

God isn't the distant person who was very demanding and kind of unreasonable where you were left to figure out what you were supposed to do. I got this new image of God ... so my theology changed, my spiritual life grew, my thinking changed. God was a person who gave you choices in your life, and it's OK what decisions you make. If there is something that God is really calling you to do, he will let you know. If you are open to that, he will let you know!

Megan reported, "I feel like I know more of who God is and more of his character and who he is for me. That helps me trust and respond to other people because I have that trust relationship in him." Barbara believes she is beginning to know the real God as she knows more about herself. She trustingly states, "I wouldn't want to have my life in anyone else's hands." Connie shared what she had learned about God:

Before the trauma I just remember believing that he was good, no matter what. Then I thought God was no longer good and I thought, "OK, I'm done!" Coming back to God made me realize that God is a forgiving God.

Emily reflected on how her perceptions had changed regarding the goodness of God:

I used to think that truth depended on circumstances being good. God is good if I'm not having a headache. God is good if I'm settling into school. God is good if things are going well with my family.... Lots of times God wasn't good because all those things that it was contingent upon weren't happening. But now God is good. Period! Case closed! So you stop stressing so much. God is good, so somehow there is going to be good come out of this and more good than I could ever imagine on my own.

Other signs of restored trust took the form of increased service, growth in spiritual and devotional life, and a surrendering of personal will. Many of the participants

exhibited their renewed sense of trust by becoming active on the mission field in various capacities. When Abby went on a mission trip, she knew that trust in God was returning. As she witnessed to people, she was able to relate more effectively because of her experience. Chet, who is blind, completed a mission trip to Honduras with the help of his wife and a friend who accompanied him. Connie went overseas on an evangelistic mission, Annie has lived on the mission field and is presently preparing for future service, and Emily managed mission trips through the summer for teens who came to do work in a poverty-stricken area. Tom has occupied his life serving the Lord in various secular and Christian organizations. His Christian worldview informs his civic responsibilities. He has found peace about the death of his only son:

It took a period of time before I could say to myself, and I had to say it to myself before I could say it to God, that I would rather have had Kenny nine years than not have had him at all. And, I say to Kenny, "I'll see you again one day!"

Other comments about how renewed trust has effected participants' lives reflected the changes that had occurred: "Those around me just know that I am more purposeful in what I do." "I am not nearly as reactive!" "I am more open to others." "I am more compassionate." Personally, when faced with challenging trust opportunities, I continue to choose to heed the Spirit's prompting and pray, "I will trust you, Lord."

Becoming Creator-Connectors

These stories give evidence of how restored trust manifested itself in the lives of these twelve participants. Their renewed connections to God and restored trust were used in new ways of reaching others for Christ and bringing others back into a trust relationship with God. Each participant became a Creator-connector and a trust bridge. With every trauma comes the possibility of restoration and redemption.

Chet told of other people coming to him for help. In his helping them, he helped himself:

It helped me to try to struggle with them helping them find an answer out of their problems. It may have just been in the moment, but I was able to put on the back burner in my thought processes my own problems.

Paul wrote this truth to the Corinthians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (2 Cor. 1:3-5, NIV)

Common Elements Found within the Study Model Research

The twelve individual cases in this study made the transition from distrust to trust in God. Several elements in the study model were experienced by all of the participants: all had lost trust because their expectations of God were not met, all lamented and experienced anger at God in forms that ranged from apathy to rage, and all were able to reframe their thinking to accommodate the restoring of trust. Each person had made intentional choices about trusting again based on the reframing and meaning making that occurred. All were served by the people of God who served as faith keepers, caregivers, Creator-connectors, and trust bridges; all reported that their image of God or perceptions of God had changed; and, all have various ministries where they have become helpers of others.

Major Findings of the Study

Finding so many common elements within the study model validated its use as a mapping instrument in the work with those whose trust in God has been shattered. Major findings of the study identified in the process of restoration are summarized.

Finding #1: Sequencing

The sequential pattern of the study model appeared to be able to accommodate the application of the individual cases studied, as seven of the twelve participants were observed to follow the sequence. While the other participants did not follow the pattern exactly, many of the elements of the model were present in each case. One participant, John, experienced so many of the elements at one time following the automobile crash ascribing a sequencing of elements was not possible. In an instant, he was a changed man. Another participant experienced three of the elements at the same time. As Lucy poured out her hurt to the Lord in the words of Psalm 42, the study model elements of lamenting, reframing, and observing were simultaneously occurring.

Finding #2: Human Differences

Sequencing variances point to another finding of this study – individual human differences will always be part of the process. Because of unique individuality, human differences will always be present and will need to be considered. The caregiver, therefore, must always be aware that while a person's situation may be easier to manage if he or she fit neatly into one or another category, the challenge in working with that person is to respect that uniqueness.

Whether or not the process follows the exact sequence of the study model, generalizations from this study reveal common responses to the pain of distrusting God. Knowing what others have experienced enables caregivers to normalize the experience for the one enduring the pain and the process. Just as grief counselors are able to normalize grief responses for the bereaved, knowledge of these different elements within

the study model may be used to help normalize the grief situation that arises in the loss of trust. With that normalization, hope is produced that “I am not always going to feel like this. I can get better.”

Finding #3: Importance of People in the Process

The importance of people cannot be underestimated or overstated. Most of the observed restoration of trust processes required other Christians to stand in the gap and to act as bridges back to trusting God. These were not only professional clergy and counselors but also were members of families and friends. Connie related the necessity of having trusted people in the process:

I can look back now and see how it was a continual process of how trusting God came about through trusting other people.... It was a process of seeing what trust in God looked like in another person, even believing it was possible, and then it happened in my life, and then in my heart.

Eleven of the twelve participants’ experiences supported this finding of the importance of people coming alongside. Abby remarked about the people who tried to support her after her mother’s death: “People who listened to me and people who loved me, they are the ones who made a difference.” She compared those positive types of caregivers with examples of people who were not helpful:

Christians who tended to give pat answers instead of just being there for me, and those people who were preaching to me weren’t helpful. The people who were just there to share those hard times, even though I didn’t know what was going on,... they were there for me, and God loved me through them.

John, the participant who was the exception to having a person act as a trust bridge, noted that even though his transformation came in the actual moments of his discovery that he was still alive following his car crash, people helped by providing support as he healed physically from his injuries suffered in the automobile accident. He also noted,

“There were people all throughout my life who helped me understand the nature of God that when this happened it was like flipping on a switch, and I knew what was going on.”

Lucy talked about people being connectors:

I believe that people stepped in and filled that distance between God and me. They really helped to heal that [breach]. I do feel like they were a step between [God and me]. A lot of people stepped into that place and helped me along.

Finding #4: Unique Ways of Help through God’s People

Just as John noted that God placed Christians in his life who had been building a hidden reserve of trust for him to be able to access when the need arose, others also expressed that people helped them in ways they were not expecting. Emily was confronted by her professor who was her caregiver in the restoration process. He made her think about her distrust and encouraged her to pray about it. Connie had friends who would not allow her to “get by telling my story superficially.” At their insistence, Connie was made to look at her repressed emotions and, thereby, discover her loss of trust in people. After giving up on Christianity, Rebecca “met a real Christian who was vibrant and happy,” who caused her to change her mind about Christianity and give it another try, and Chet received the motivation to live with his blindness through the witness of a dear friend. He told this story about his friend, another minister, who developed A.L.S., Lou Gehrig’s disease:

He was a strong witness for me in that he never complained or shared any doubts. He was a man I almost idolized. He didn’t say anything during his illness. He attended church every Sunday at my church. I watched him go from a deeply sensitive man, vibrant, alive, to someone who couldn’t talk or get around. When I sensed that he might not have a whole lot of time left to live, I sat with him and told him what he had meant to me. It was an amazing experience. We both laughed and cried together. Four days later, he drowned from swallowing his own saliva. I had part of his funeral. He was a very imperfect human being, but in my life he was a God-send.

Chet called his friend a “God-send.” While other participants did not label their helpers/guides in that way, each participant expressed similar views about the people that God did send.

Finding # 5: Becoming the Helpers

Chet was able to observe trust in God in another person when he needed to see that trusting could be possible, even at the worst moments. God does send people to be trust bridges and Creator-connectors in moments of need. The process does not stop there, however, the helped, in turn, may become those same connectors for someone else. Chet continues to minister and to reach out to people. His blindness itself makes people aware that something inside him allows him to continue living as if he could see. Life for Chet is challenging but it is undergirded by a strong sense of God’s working in and through him and others:

God is not limited by our understanding of him. God is not dependent on us, but I would hasten to add that he is dependent on us because we are his hands, his eyes, his mouth, his touch. If we do not fulfill our potential as children of God, God will keep sending out the charge, the current into those who are receptive, and he will then live through them, but only as long as they hold out their hands to those next to them where they can be recharged to the power of God by those around them. Even though I was trying to help other people with their problems, my problems were unintentionally being met.

God makes a two-way street of trust bridges. Being a blessing to someone else results in being blessed.

Rebecca experienced her own deliverance from the devastating effects of sexual abuse and has come to a place where she was able to forgive her father and mother and to recognize her love for them, regardless of her history. She spoke of becoming aware of the truth “that sets you free,” as God revealed memories long blocked from her conscious

mind. She talked about one of her experiences of healing:

For the first forty-five years of my life, I felt hopeless in the face of fear. I was driven by fear, just totally, from my earliest memory. I remember one day I was praying with two friends in the morning, and I told them about experiencing a lot of fear. One of them said that they had a word from the Lord. She said, "Fear is not real, you are afraid of the fear." I looked at her and said, "I think you are telling me the truth, but I can't understand what you are saying." About five hours later, I was talking with another friend about having fear and she said, word for word, what the first woman said. I told her that I knew then that was the truth because it was the second time I had heard it that day! I got in the car and was pulling out of the church parking lot and just as I stopped at the street, I got it! It is just fear of fear, and it was not real. God is real!

Her restoration has led into a deliverance ministry. Often as she counsels and prays, God gives her a word of knowledge for the person with whom she is counseling. That spoken word becomes a bridge for healing to happen:

You learn best about deliverance in counseling in a one-on-one situation. One of my clients was a good teacher for me. God would give me a word [of knowledge], and I would speak it, and she would look like I had thrown her against the wall.

The truth is powerful. God is using Rebecca to speak truth to others, and she is in a viable position to be that trust bridge for other victims of abuse.

Finding #6: Changed Perceptions of God

All of the participants reported that they know more of God as a result of their journey toward restoration of trust. Their perceptions of God have been changed. Like Job, they may not understand why the trauma happened, but all of them can see that they have been changed and that they have a new and enlarged picture of God. Job said, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (42:3, 5, NIV).

Emily talked about reading the books of Job and Lamentations as she struggled

with God. She said, “Job was really good. Even though it doesn’t give you any answers, which is frustrating, you get to see someone who is able to cry out to God, and God doesn’t strike him down for doing it.” As she read from her Bible, God asked her one of the same questions that he asked Job:

There was this one verse in Job that just cracked me up. God had been listening to Job cry out and complain and whine and the Lord responds with this verse, “And where were you when the mountains were formed and where were you....” It just helped me remember, kind of put things back in perspective again. Like God was saying to me, “Where were you?... I know that you are mad at me right now for all that’s going on, and I know that you think that life is unfair, but I am God and I am worthy, and where were you at the beginning of time? You weren’t there!

Another truth that Emily learned about God was that she was capable of hearing God’s voice and of knowing God’s truth for herself. When people challenged her authority and claimed that they had heard from God about her leadership decisions, she could confidently know that “God has placed me in this position and this is the truth he has given me for now so I will obediently follow that in spite of what they are telling me right now.”

Rebecca remarked about how her thinking about God has changed:

Because I believed that the Bible was true and that God does respond to prayers, but because he wasn’t responding to mine, I thought he just cared more about other people than he did about me. I don’t have doubts about God being personal, anymore.... I’ve gotten to a point where I know that he loves me because I am one of his children. I know he loves me all the time.

Finding #7: Restoration and Greater Ministry

The restoration processes of the twelve participants resulted in deeper trust levels that were manifested in greater service to God and greater submission to his will. Many have done mission work in various settings or are preparing to go into the mission field.

All sense that God has a plan and purpose for their lives, and they are willing to embrace what God intends for them. Intentionality and passion mark their work for the Lord.

While doubts and fears taunt them from time-to-time, their restoration process serves to encourage them, and they choose to trust God rather than allow those fears to control them. Rebecca said, “One thing I tell my kids is that you can express fear,... but don’t let it ruin your life.” She added, “The thing I am focusing on right now is trying to maintain the truth that he loves me because the more I do that the more I can do for people.”

Emily’s restoration of trust was evident as she listened for God’s timing for her entrance into the mission field. She knew that she had been called to do mission work, but her parents were not in agreement with her going at that time. She waited, feeling like she could not be disobedient and go against her parents’ wishes. She prayed, “God if this is what you want, my parents are going to have to fall in line with it.” They never did, at that time. She related the rest of that story:

There was great sadness in my heart to have to go off to college [instead of going on a mission trip. Then I came here [to seminary], and what do I get to do in the summer? Lead mission trips, and my parents were totally behind it. They were totally excited. I think I was ready for it in a way that I was not ready before because God had matured me. It was just like reaping that harvest of obedience. How much better it is [to have waited]. “Yes, God, I did hear you correctly. How much better it is to go now that you’ve prepared me and that I have the whole-hearted support of my parents and friends who are praying for me and standing behind me!” One night I came back to my room, this summer, and it just finally hit me. In Christ there is fullness of life, and there’s no other place that I would rather be right now. I am finally at the place where, “This is it!” Life with God is amazing! It is more than you could ever imagine— just having that passion about the Christian life for the first time. It finally got beyond a “get-out-of-hell-free” card for me. I realize that this is exactly where I want to be.

All of the participants’ stories have “happy endings.” Space does not allow for their retelling, but restored trust in God has been manifested in each one. Spiritual lives

were healed, and spiritual growth occurred in the midst of pain. Chet, in his earthy way, commented that “the pain of depression was like sitting in a bucket of manure.” Smiling he said, “When you finally stick your head up, then you know what makes flowers grow the most beautiful.” God had somehow redeemed the suffering and made Chet see that something good had come from his blindness. He still hopes to see even after twenty-five years of blindness. He said, “God is in control, and God can do anything. My God, if he chose to, could say, ‘Zap!’ and I would be able to see!” Then he said wistfully, almost prayerfully, “God, I wish he would!”

All of these participants made meaning from their experience, and they grew spiritually from the suffering they endured. Even as Job was restored at the end of his story, so each of the participants realized a restoration, too. While these particular episodes are ended, their stories have chapters left to be told. Life goes on and new trials will present themselves. This particular segment of their life histories will serve as a source of encouragement when those trials do come, and God, faithful as he is, will continue to motivate and empower the process of trusting.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Trust is essential to the formation and continuation of any relationship.

Succinctly, one subject (Annie) stated, “Relationship, by definition, is trust.” Using a medical metaphor, well-being depends upon the health of relationships. Because humans were created to be in a trusting relationship with God (Gen. 1:26-31), loss of trust in God is spiritually life-threatening to a relationship with him. If a Christian who no longer trusts in God or whose trust has been diminished to critical levels does not make the transition and return to a trusting position with God, the relationship is weakened, gets sick, and dies.

From the experience people have with other human beings, and certainly in their experience with God, they know that when trust relationships are disturbed, they suffer. Sometimes the fault lies with them, and they accept the responsibility, but much of the time, they believe that the fault lies with other people. They especially think that way about God because he is expected to be in control of everything. They usually blame God for the breakdown in the trust relationship with him. Like Job they say, “If it is not he, then who is it?” (9:24, NIV). They think, “If only he would have done (whatever it is that they think should have happened), then I would not be suffering this present distress.” They withdraw from God, the Creator, doubting his care. Just like Adam and Eve did after the Fall (Gen. 1-3), their relationship with him is weakened as they withdraw and hide.

Once again using the medical metaphor of distrust being “dis-ease” or illness, broken trust is an illness of the spirit that weakens spiritual immune systems. Toxic fear

and anger levels rise when expectations of God are not satisfied. Doubt and distrust compromise the system, similar to the way electrolytes get out of balance in the body. Just as physical illness requires medical treatment, the spiritual illness of broken trust in God also requires attention. Appropriate intervention has to happen or death comes.

The focus of this study was to observe participants who obviously had experienced appropriate and adequate interventions (since criteria for participation required a restoration of trust in God) and to examine what those interventions were. The participants' recreated and restored relationship with God and their renewed spiritual life gave evidence that help may be found within the study model of restoration of trust. In light of the purpose of this study, the personal experiences of the twelve participants proved to be a valuable source of information about how that process works.

Research Results

This research answered the research questions: (1) What were the key elements and progressive stages in the process of moving from broken trust in God back to a restored trust? (2) In what ways did the experiences of the participants correspond to the trust restoration model that was developed? (3) Did a significant deepening of the level of trust in God occur in the process?

Answers to these questions confirmed the study model as a viable resource for ministry. Similar key elements and progressive stages of the restoration process were evident within the twelve stories told. Meaning making happened as participants accommodated and assimilated their experiences and transitioned into stable relationships with God. All of the participants acknowledged deeper levels of trust in God. While they had "gone through the fire," a tempering took place. God had proven

himself faithful to his word: “When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa. 43:2b-3, NIV). Finally, their transitions were accomplished through similar resources, activities, and experiments. People came alongside to act as guides, participants made intentional choices to be honest about their disillusionment with God, and they explored the possibilities of entrusting increasingly larger increments of their lives to God.

Realizations from the Study

This study confirmed several concepts generally held to be true: the importance of expectations of God and how unmet expectations cause loss of trust and damage to the relationship, the importance of social support and how people need other people in times of developmental transition, and that change brought on by trauma can have a positive outcome as meaning is made of the circumstance.

I was exploring whether a stage process could account for restoration of trust. Though the process of restoration was found to be a significant marker for all the participants in their respective lives, the study could not confirm that the process followed a linear pattern. Stages of the process could be discerned in all twelve of the cases studied but did not happen in sequence in some of them. In seven of the twelve, a linear progression of the stages was observed. In the remaining five cases, stages could be discerned, but the research cannot claim a sequential pattern.

Unmet Expectations

Expectations play an incredibly important part of human existence. Unmet expectations and the resultant anger essentially form the basis for the distress represented

within much of the counseling milieu. Traumatic events like those studied in this project produced a huge wave of distress for the people involved because their expectations and assumptions of God were destroyed. Janoff-Bulman addresses what happens to people whose trust has been broken because of trauma and what must occur, as a result:

When a person no longer feels protected, but instead feels unsafe in a world that is no longer benign, the possibility of recurrence—of disease, crime, accidents, or disaster—seems very real. Once an individual has confronted his or her own vulnerability, it is difficult to believe that “lightening never strikes twice in the same place.” Traumatic events rupture the trust necessary for such a belief. In the end, it is a rebuilding of this trust—the reconstruction of a viable, non-threatening assumptive world—that constitutes the core coping task of victims. (69)

The participants responded to trauma with anger, dismay, and disillusionment as their expectations of God were dashed. Working through the restoration process enabled their inner “assumptive world” to be reconstructed. Their enlarged psychological and theological understandings were accommodated and assimilated into an acceptance of what had happened to them. These new cognitions about God and about themselves restored their trust and, as a result, prompted actions in greater service to his kingdom.

Social Support

“People who need people, are the luckiest people in the world,” sings Barbra Streisand, in her hit recording. While not agreeing with the part about being the “luckiest people in the world,” but being very aware of the disillusionment, despair, and distrust in God they felt, the participants all expressed the need for people who could be trusted. People, in fact, do need other people. Janoff-Bulman writes about the crucial role of other people: “Within psychology, there is an enormous literature on the importance of social support.... Social support is positively related to mental health.... better adjustment” (144). The significance of people being on hand to help with the process

cannot be underestimated or overstated. Those people who were chosen to be the caregivers served as the links leading back to a trust relationship with God. Affirming the value of social support, the Apostle Paul writes in Hebrews 10:25, "Let us not give up meeting together.... Let us encourage one another" (NIV).

Sequencing of Stages

This study relied on theories of developmental psychology and faith development that employ sequencing of stages. Developmental psychologists (e.g., Piaget; Kegan; Fowler; Gillespie) and other stage theorists (e.g., Kubler-Ross; Atkinson; Mitchell) informed this study. Finding similarities in the sequencing of elements within the process for seven of the twelve participants where one element built upon the preceding one corresponded with my personal experience of restoration. The other five participants did not follow the sequence at all but moved in and out of a stage and experienced one element before another or experienced them simultaneously.

Most of the participants were unaware of the ongoing process. Only in looking back could they realize the stages in the transformation and determine whether or not they followed a sequence. Each participant approached the restoration process individually and sequencing in a linear pattern did not appear to be a significant finding.

The realization that people have their own time tables, unique approaches, and theologies is important, because it alerts the caregiver to the need to be sensitive to the person's location in the process and to proceed carefully so that the suffering one is not pushed or rushed into a place he or she is not yet ready to enter. As the caregiver determines the stage that the suffering one is presenting, he or she may construct a mental map or conceptualization of a treatment plan based on which stages have been

experienced. The map may or may not be shared with the suffering one, but it may serve as an aid to the caregiver as the sufferer is guided to restoration. Personally, I like to share my conceptualization with my clients who then may approve the plan or alter it if they do not feel comfortable. This results in a team approach, a better understanding between players, and direction for the “game.”

Implications for Ministry

Experiencing the loss of trust is like being the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness. Research results identified several major findings that provide a potential mapping instrument to help guide God’s people who have lost sight of him through the brokenness of their trust in him. The study model map may enable those in the wilderness of distrust to transition or travel into the “Promised Land,” where a trust position and a greater understanding of God awaits them. Research findings promote hope for those in the wilderness and provide direction for those who are called to be the guides, i.e., pastors, Christian counselors, teachers, and others who care for God’s people.

Again using the children of Israel metaphor, God used Moses to deliver the children of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. Moses led them through the wilderness into the Promised Land. God sent him to enter into the midst of their suffering as one of them and to lead them out of it.

God continues to delivered his people from bondage and slavery and has guided them out of the morass of distrust. For the participants of this study, slavery experiences were trauma, lament, despair, and feelings of abandonment by God. God heard their moaning and sent someone to lead them out of that situation. A caregiver was sent to act as their guide: a Moses who identified with them, crawled into their pit of despair, and

led them out of slavery. Even though they did not understand the process, God was faithful not to let his children perish in the wilderness. He was faithful to provide care, and he was faithful to nurture them through caregivers. Trust was reborn in that faithfulness.

Through the use of the study model, the restoration path of reentry into trusting God can be tracked, and a person's position in the process can be determined. Intervention landmarks can be identified, and the guide will know what needs to be done to walk with the one who is hurting into the next step in his or her healing. Fowler writes about the importance of having someone who will accompany the person in the transitional process that this study addresses. He describes in Faith Development and Pastoral Care the role of the counselor:

The role of counseling and pastoral support in these instances calls initially for providing a vicarious experience of third-person perspective taking and inviting the person to view and evaluate things from that standpoint. Developmentally helpful counseling calls for a kind of teaching and modeling which can help persons in this stage recognize the possibility of a third-person perspective. (89)

Fowler further states that Christians need "the gifts and the structuring orientations of persons of other stages to encounter them with correcting emphases and energies" (Faith Development 95). Referencing Fowler, Anna Bradshaw and George Fitchett, who interviewed subjects regarding how they dealt with the question of theodicy, affirm the significance of having a guide:

Confusion at the pieces that don't fit suggests he [Jim, one of the subjects about whom they write] may be undergoing a developmental transition.... The key is to find the way to a new theology that fits his experience. Jim probably will not be able to move to another stage unless he knows someone in that next stage who welcomes him to it. (187)

Theological Implications

The theological implications that came out of this study are basic Christian doctrine: God is faithful, God is trustworthy, and God is Comforter and Guide. As I reflected on the study results, those three divine attributes relate in my mind to the Holy Trinity and to the simple Celtic meditation mentioned at the end of Chapter 2: “O Father who sought me, O Son who bought me, O Spirit who taught me” (Johnson). Simple as that prayer is, it briefly encapsulates the work of each person in the Trinity. I want to examine each of those phrases one at a time to make the concept of the Trinity relevant to practical living in a trust relationship with God.

God Is Faithful

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning” (Lam. 3:23, NIV). That verse encapsulates the truth of the phrase, “O Father who sought me,” where a loving, persistent father is portrayed. From the beginning, God the Father sought his children to be in relationship with him. He created them for relationship. Even as he formed the covenant relationship with the children of Israel, he forms believers into his covenant people today. He said to the Israelites, and he continues to say to present-day believers, that he is their God and they are his people. He laid the covenant plan out very clearly, promising, “If you will do this, and this,... then I will do this and this.” The people said, “O.K., we will do that.” As time passed, the children of Israel rejected his plans and began to go their own way. Today, his people are no different, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa. 53:6, NIV). God allowed his children, today’s believers included, to wallow in the misery of their own making. When they cried out about how

miserable they were, he faithfully gathered them up again and reiterated the covenant: “If you will do this and this.” The cycle was repeated over and over in the Old Testament, and God faithfully continued to reach out and seek his people. That seeking by God never quits. He continues to seek, wanting to be in relationship with his people.

Throughout Scripture, the faithfulness of God the Father is extolled. Believers need to be reminded of that truth. David writes, “I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly” (Ps. 40:10, NIV). “For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies” (Ps. 57:10, NIV). “But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ps. 86:15, NIV). Later, the Apostle Paul writes, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. And when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13, NIV).

God’s faithfulness to his people was evident in this study from the very fact that, in each situation, God did not leave his people to fend for themselves, though that is what they perceived had happened as they expressed how abandoned by God they felt. One of the participants talked about God’s faithfulness being the subject of the poem *Footprints in the Sand* where the person sees only one set of footprints in the sand when times were difficult and the reality was that God was carrying that person during that hard time, which accounted a lone set of footprints: the person was not walking alone.

God is faithful even when believers are not. Human trust in him wavers, but his trust never fails. As Chet said about his blindness, “I guess, even in spite of my

questioning agnosticism or whatever, I have never sensed a break in God's love for me. My trust may have been broken, but God trusted me and thought I could do it anyway."

People in this study were amazed to look back at how God had worked on their behalf even while they felt alienated from him. He sent people who acted in his stead in ways that were perceived by the sufferer as being good and helpful. He, the loving Father, faithfully sought them out.

God Is Trustworthy

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, NASB) is the message of truth regarding the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, "O Son who bought me."

Jesus came because God the Father sent his only Son into the world to redeem the world (John 3:16). He suffered and died to atone for all the sin of the world (Eph. 1:7). The Son of God came to redeem the sinful state of humanity and to breach the separation from God (Rom. 5:18-19). He brought people back into relationship with God through his atoning work on the cross (Col. 1:19-20). Someone had to pay the price for sin, and Jesus stepped up and paid the ransom with his very own life (1 Tim. 2:5). "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV).

In his passion and redemptive work on the cross, Jesus proved his trustworthiness. He could have opted out of incarnation. He could have opted out of his passion. Instead, he chose to hang on the cross and, in his pain and suffering, be abandoned by God. Then he died—but true to his word, on the third day he rose from the dead. Because he lives, believers, too, shall live. The ultimate degree of trustworthiness was demonstrated by

God the Son. He did what he was called to do to bring salvation to humanity, even though it meant his own death. Jesus modeled trustworthiness. Because he did, he is worthy of trust. As believers observe Jesus' love and sacrifice, they are encouraged to sacrifice their distrustful fear and move toward restoration.

In his suffering, Jesus cried out to the Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus asked the "Why?" question, too. He demonstrated that he was fully human as well as fully divine. "Why?" also becomes the cry from believers' lips in suffering. As their suffering is identified with his, however, meaning is given to the suffering, and the pain is made more bearable. Paul writes, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11, NIV)

When Chet was trying to share some of the desperation he felt when going blind, he talked about crying what Jesus had cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He said, "I think God understands when I allow myself to have some of those same feelings." God remains a mystery, but suffering brings an identity with Christ. That, too, is a mystery, but with this identification with "the Son who bought me," believers are made stronger. God is trustworthy.

God Is Comforter, Teacher, and Guide

Jesus, himself, confirmed the work of the Spirit as "O Spirit who taught me":

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:26-27, NIV)

For centuries, believers have recited the Nicene Creed and avowed the truth of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified." God the Spirit, who is Comforter, Teacher, and Guide, is also the Lord and Giver of Life who empowers sinful humanity to live again in relationship with him. The Spirit of God is the one who convicts of sin, who motivates change in lives, and who gives the power to live in trust relationships. The Spirit who seals believers to God in baptism comes again and again to woo them back into relationship when they step outside of it. The Spirit of God motivates reconciliation and restoration. The Spirit makes trusting possible again through imparting the power to hope and then to trust. Through the process, the Spirit teaches the difference God makes for believers, working inside the thought processes to help believers compare the benefits of trusting against the non-benefits of distrust. The Spirit teaches through other people's witness of trusting and trustworthiness and is in charge of the restoration process, because it is essentially a learning process or a relearning process. God, "the Spirit who taught me," is Comforter, Teacher, and Guide: the transforming Power.

I see the action of instilling trust and the process of restoration when that trust is broken as being God's effort of love. In other words, God the Father creates his people and calls them into a trust relationship; Jesus Christ redeems believers when they have chosen to move apart from that faithful relationship and forgives them for separating themselves from God through distrust; and the Holy Spirit reaches and teaches believers to recognize the need for the reestablishment of the relationship, motivating and

empowering them to move back toward trusting. Restoration requires the loving action of all three functions.

This process may be too simplistic, but it works for me. I believe that the work of the Trinity is always involved in human affairs. This involvement is a mystery, to be sure, but growth in knowing God begins to enable believers to comprehend how loved they are. Barbara said, “As you know God more, you know yourself more, and as you know yourself more, you know God more.” That loving, reciprocal nature of relationships promotes trust.

The Question of Theodicy

Humanity’s questions of theodicy will never be resolved this side of heaven. The “Why?” questions will persist as humans try to reconcile their concept of a good God with the suffering of the world. Believers will continue to struggle with questions about God as they experience suffering. Does God still entertain the Accuser’s plot to see if believers will remain faithful, as he did with Job? Are believers part of some cosmic game being played between God and the Accuser? Does God sit in heaven like he is in some video arcade pushing buttons to effect what the action in his peoples’ lives will be? Each time a tragedy occurs on earth, is God involved? Was Tom’s pastor expressing truth as he tried to help a grieving father by saying, “This is not God’s fault. The laws of nature will not be changed: someone burned that badly will die”?

Questions about God and suffering will continue because the “Why?” of suffering defies human logic. What is known is that suffering is part of earthly existence. What is known is that people can learn and grow from it. What is known is that in that process of learning believers “see” more of God, as Job did (42:5).

My prayer for suffering believers is that they will image more of God as the Holy Other, the Transcendent One, who chooses to reveal himself in his way, not necessarily in ways humans deem appropriate. I pray that in suffering, their identification with Jesus Christ will provide a way as his power and presence are experienced. Then, they will know both the transcendence and the immanence of God. Like Job may believers say, “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:1, NIV).

Limitations of Study

Race, cultural differences, and the preponderance of seminary students as participants were the limitations of this study. I only interviewed and observed Anglo-Saxon Americans, most of whom were seminary students. While one of the criteria for being chosen as a participant was to be a Christian, the study could have enlisted more people from a broader base of Christianity: participants from other races and cultures would have enriched the mix of interview data. As ten of the twelve participants were seminary students, another enriching factor would have been to interview Christians from other venues of life. All of my participants were in ministry or preparation for ministry, except for one. The study could have given more generalizable results to non-seminary Christians who comprise the majority of the church population if other than seminary students had been chosen as participants.

Suggestions for Further Study

The following suggestions are made for consideration for further study.

1. Research could be done to see if the study model works on “non-ministry people” as well as it did for those in ministry or studying for it.

2. A compare-and-contrast study with Christians in seminary and outside of

seminary could provide information to see if those in seminary have different experiences. Does the Bible or prayer mean more to their restoration process because of seminary environment?

3. Since trust is a universal need and function for relationships, a cross cultural study would be of interest. In my experience, some African-Americans related that they do not distrust God. In fact, those who talked to me were quite shocked that anyone would get angry at God. Is this a cultural bias possibly resulting from years of slavery where a slave could not question those in higher authority? Might that apply to questioning God?

4. A study comparing Christians with other world religions may be of interest in determining how theodicy plays out with Hindu or Muslim deities when trust is threatened by circumstances of life.

5. A study comparing results of choices to trust or to remain distrustful in God would be enlightening. People who did die spiritually as a result of the brokenness of their trust in God could be interviewed. In my interviewing process, I ran across only one person who fit that description. He was a man who had been a minister but after the death of his daughter could not reconcile with a God who would allow such a tragedy to happen. He has since left the ministry, divorced his wife, and is trying to come to terms with his agnosticism. Would stories with “bad endings” rather than “happy endings” serve to motivate people to come into a trust position again?

6. A study using mature Christians who have been through the breaking of trust more than one time would be interesting. I wondered how the immaturity of participants

influenced the findings since many were younger than I and were coming to seminary out of college.

Practical Applications

Anger is a common experience with suffering and grief, but Christians, especially, have a very difficult time expressing it. They are discouraged by themselves or others who deem it un-Christian when their theology is faulty. They think “God will strike them dead.” Job validates that the anger of suffering must be expressed before healing can happen. God commends Job for expressing himself honestly and trying to understand. Perhaps a practical application of this research would be for churches to recognize the need not only to educate people about anger but also to provide support groups for people who are suffering anger at God in an atmosphere where it would be safe to express such emotion. Churches could establish support groups for people facing the loss of trust in God. They could meet in homes if the aversion to God was so strong that the church would not be an appealing venue. A workbook could be used in connection with a class where willing participants would take a six or seven-week course talking about the study model used in this research. I have written such a document.

Restoration of trust stories would make good testimonies for church services. The emphasis for a section of the church year could be devoted to the importance of trusting God, and sermons could be developed around that theme.

Educational materials on the importance of trusting could be incorporated into work with children and adolescents. Trust experiments could be done at camps, retreat settings, etc., as a sort of preventive intervention so that when participants are confronted

with a situation that would break their trust in God, they have some internal resources to resist that temptation.

Personal Reflections

Stories are life giving. The fact that someone shared the story of Jesus Christ brought me into a personal relationship where I realized that I am loved and forgiven. The message of Jesus' death for the atonement of sin and his resurrection from the dead, guaranteeing eternal life for believers, has changed lives over centuries of time and will continue until the end of time. It changed mine.

Stories are compelling. When sinful human beings have heard the story of Jesus Christ and come into relationship with him, they are compelled to share that story. The most effective evangelistic tool available is sharing how his story has produced a personal transformation and how his story is now the model for living the new life. Believers become his storytellers, ambassadors for Christ:

If anyone is in Christ, he [or she] is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them, and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:17-20, NIV)

The heart of this research has been shared stories. In that sharing, God's faithfulness is affirmed, the transforming love of Jesus Christ is validated, and the power of the Holy Spirit is witnessed. My hope and prayer for this study is that it may serve as a helpful tool for those in ministry as Christ's ambassadors and that other lives will be touched and healed as the truth of the trustworthiness of God is restored in his people.

Soli deo gloria!

APPENDIX A

Solicitation Letter

Date

Dear Friend in Christ,

I need your help! As a Doctor of Ministry student, I am presently working on the project for my dissertation on the restoration of trust in God following a significant trauma that caused distrust in God. (A trauma is defined as any life event that caused you physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual pain or suffering.) I will be interviewing professing Christians (people who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior) who are at least 22 years old and have had a trusting relationship with God, experienced a significant trauma that caused them to distrust Him, and are now in a position of restored trust in God.

If you volunteer and are selected as a participant in this research, I will ask you to do two, 60-minute interviews with me. The interviews will be tape recorded for my study later. Confidentiality will be maintained as to the identity of those who are chosen, and the tape recordings will be returned to each respondent upon the completion of the project.

I appreciate your willingness to take the time to read this letter. If you fit the criteria described above and would be willing to participate, please fill out the attached form. If you do not wish to be considered for the study, you do not have to read any further, but I will ask you to pray for this project! Thanks so much for your consideration!

In Christ's love,

Carol B. Saenger
SPO 1319

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol—Contact Visit

A. Rapport Building

As you already know, I am working on my Doctor of Ministry dissertation project at Asbury Theological Seminary. I want you to be comfortable with me and to feel free to ask me any questions, at any time, about the research or about me, personally. (Engage in small talk.)

B. Information Sharing

It is good of you to volunteer to spend time with me so that we can work together to explore your experience with distrust and restored trust in God. Thank you for being willing to share the story of the process that you have experienced. I will be asking you some questions that I will ask of everyone that I interview, and we will be taping these interviews so that I can make sure that I get every word. I will be listening to your story intently, but I would like to be able to listen to it again. I also will be transcribing the interviews so that I may study your story. Your story is an important one, and I am honored that you will allow me to hear it.

You have already signed the consent form to participate in this study and have agreed to be taped. I just want to remind you that I will safeguard your confidentiality. Your real identity will not be disclosed, and when this study is complete, I will not be keeping the tapes. I will destroy them, or I will return them to each person who participated. If you would like to keep your tape, I will be happy to send it to you. You can let me know at the end of the interviews.

You know that we will be doing two sixty-minute interviews that build upon each other. The first interview will focus on your telling me about what your trust in God was like before the trauma that caused your distrust in him. Then I would like you to share the traumatic event that occurred, and tell me how that affected you and your relationship with God. The second interview will focus on the process you experienced as your trust in God was restored.

Do you have any questions?

We need to schedule some times for the interviews and agree on where we can do them. I want you to feel comfortable with the location. I can come to your home, if you wish. We do need to be in a place with no distractions. Do you have any suggestions as to where you would like to meet with me? To make the most of the interview situation, we need to meet in times spaced at least two days and not more than two weeks apart as we schedule these interview appointments. What is your preference?

(Make the arrangements for the interviews.)

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

I am willing to be a participant in the restoration of trust project. I understand that I will be interviewed by the researcher and that the two sixty-minute interviews will be tape recorded for later study. I also understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that I may have the recorded tapes following the completion of the project. I am aware that I may discontinue the research interviews at any time without penalty.

I am willing to be a participant (please check) _____ Yes

Name _____

Phone number at home _____ at work _____

E-mail address _____

(Please put a check mark by the number or e-mail address that you would prefer that I call and note a time when I can best reach you.)

Age (must be at least 22) _____

Gender (please check one) _____ Male _____ Female

Please mail this completed form to Carol Saenger, ATS SPO 1319.

You will be contacted about your participation within two weeks.

Thank you.

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol—Session One

A. Rapport Building

After appropriate small talk, ask if the participant has any questions about what we will be doing. Check to make sure that the Informed Consent Form is signed and understood. Ask if the participant is ready to begin the interview.

B. Interview Questions for Session One

1. Tell me the story of your life as a Christian before the trauma.
2. What are some of the characteristics that you recall in your faith life?
3. What caused faith to grow in you?
4. If we could place your trust on a scale of one to ten, with ten being a very deep level of trust and one being a very low level of trust, where on that scale would your trust in God have been before the trauma?
5. How did that trust in God manifest itself?
6. Please share with me the significant trauma that happened to you.
7. What were your reactions to that event?
8. Do you remember particular grief reactions? Anger? Disappointment? Sadness? Shock? Recall how you felt for me.
9. How did your distrust in God manifest itself?
11. What person or persons, if any, played a part in the experience of broken trust?

C. Closure

Affirm the participant's work in the session and confirm the next scheduled session. Close with prayer.

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol—Session Two

A. Rapport Building

After appropriate small talk, ask the participant if he or she is ready to begin this last interview. Any questions? Paul Harvey likes to say, “And now for the rest of the story!” Please share with me the rest of your story.

B. Interview Questions for Session Two

1. How did trust in God begin in you again?
2. Did you consciously know that you were being restored to trusting God again?
3. Reflecting on that process, do you see any sequence in the way it happened?
4. What specific elements in the process can you recall that helped your trust be restored?
5. Did any particular person play a significant part in the restoration of your trust?
6. Estimate the time from the point of the trauma until you felt that you were trusting in God again.
7. How has your restored trust in God manifested itself?
8. Again, using a scale of one to ten, with ten being a very deep level of trust in God and one being a very low level of trust, where would you place your trust level now?

C. Closure

Affirm the work the participant has done in this session.

D. Wrap-Up

You have done a good job! Have you decided if you would like to have the tapes I have recorded of your story? (Wait for answer and respond appropriately.)

Thank you for your help in this study. I am deeply grateful that you would share yourself and your faith with me. I am the richer for it. May I pray a prayer of blessing for you before I go? Close with prayer.

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